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"WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM."

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## Theology.

### THE RIGHT USE OF TEMPORAL BLESSINGS, AS A BRANCH OF CHRISTIAN DUTY.

From the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine.

To be able, clearly and distinctly, to mark the hand of an Almighty Benefactor in the reception of temporal blessings, is a high and valuable attainment; but of still greater importance to the soul, and its advancement in holiness, is the manner and spirit in which these are received and appropriated.

This point in Christian experience will bear more solemn and prayerful meditation than is generally bestowed on it. Were such blessings received by minds well disciplined and vigilantly secured against self-sufficiency and vain-glorious, more blessed results would follow the good things of this life, and more correct models of the purity, the dignity, and the humility of Christ would be exhibited amongst those of his followers who are placed in an easy or affluent condition.

The mind of man is naturally buoyant and subtle, and it is not an easy matter for him to receive a crowd of earthly blessings as they ought to be received, retaining and using them in such a manner as will render them truly profitable to himself and his fellow-creatures. To human nature it is certainly flattering and pleasing to walk abroad in the streets, to move amongst friends and neighbours, to transact the business of life, under the sunshine of temporal prosperity; but to maintain a chastened frame of mind, a proper equilibrium of temper, a heart free from the specks and blemishes of arrogance and haughtiness, of pride and display, is a difficult, and yet an awfully momentous, duty.

Such seasons of temporal brightness, though enviably inviting to those who look only on external appearances, bring with them a train of perils which have strong tendencies to check the growth of vital godliness. They are apt to enchain the thoughts, the desires, and the affections to the world; they lead to self-confident boasting, or improper levity; there is often manifested less simplicity, less watchfulness, a more lofty bearing, and a larger share of assurance in acting.

Too frequently a spirit of worldliness stealthily encompasses the soul, and renders it more impervious to the pure radiance of Christian holiness; the out-gomings of thought wax lighter and freer, and less frequently aspire after the solemn realities of eternity.

Temporal advantages, to be rightly received, require a large preponderance of special grace. This must be the unceasing aim of the recipient, or they will never be real blessings to him. They must have blended with them a proportionate increase of spiritual-mindedness, and of deep, fervent, humble piety: if this be not the case, the soul will decline in holiness and purity, and be found committing various errors in straying from that point—Calvary—on which the eye of the Christian must be fixed if he would "grow in grace," and in "the love of Christ."

Hence there was a stern necessity, that each rising of the soul, each avenue of the thoughts, each excursion of the wishes, be vigilantly guarded, lest earthly enjoyments and pleasures, earthly fashions and allurements, earthly successes and prospects, be found usurping dominion in the kingdom of the heart, where the Deity ought to reign supreme and univalled.

One of the great sources of internal security possessed by the Christian, is the evidence faith affords him of being under the special guidance and protection of a superintending Providence; and when peace is within his walls, and prosperity within his borders, he marks the hand which hath been stretched out in his behalf, and with gratitude acknowledges the "tender mercies" of the Giver.

But such ascriptions of gratitude must also be accompanied by open and practical results, or they neither can nor will be well-pleasing in the sight of Him from whom they have been received. Bare acknowledgments are not sufficient; they must have a tangible and visible form in the life, "so that the world may take knowledge of them," and thus be able to profit by them.

In bestowing gifts on friends or acquaintances, we look for more substantial proofs of gratitude than mere acknowledgments: we look for a return, if not in kind, at least in quantity; we love to see that the grateful recollections are graven on the memory, and virtually acknowledged in the subsequent behaviour, character, and speech of the recipient; and also regard these grateful returns as beautiful traits of a noble and rightly-disciplined mind.

Much more does He, whose omniscient eye scans every peculiarity, marks every thought, and registers every action, look for a right return and use of those blessings He has been pleased to bestow. How necessary, therefore, that Christians should earnestly and prayerfully endeavour to make "those returns his love requires," when, in his tender mercies, overlooking previous waywardness and rebellion in the wilderness, he turneth them into green pastures, and leadeth them beside the still waters, raineth down manna around their path, and causeth gushing streams to flow at their feet! How ought they, beneath such an accumulation of benefits, more strictly and solemnly to guard the conduct, lest they be found guilty of ingratitude or forgetfulness!

Gifts from earthly friends are generally the reward of merit: but on this ground, man, in the sight of his Creator, as inherently estranged from him, has no title.—Temporal prosperity is often found to be the result of human ingenuity and skill; yet mortals have no right to arrogate to themselves credit on that ground: such capabilities are the gifts of God; and if he has been pleased to bestow them on his creatures, and has opened a field for the exercise of their exertions, and permitted attending successes, can He not, as the controller of events, as easily baffle the schemes of men, and take away their capacity to act, as he can prepare and enlarge the theatre of their exertions, and permit them to taste the sweets arising from successful results in their performances and speculations?

Inherent merit man has not: all earthly blessings, of whatever nature they may be, whatever guise they may assume, however they may act on those who receive them, are primarily derived from the beneficent hand of the Almighty; and it is in this light the Christian mind contemplates and receives them, and is called on to improve them.

It is, therefore, to the right use of such temporal blessings, and the effects they are intended to produce on the Christian,—in his experience, his character, and actions, whilst passing on in his pilgrimage through this world of allurements and noise, of suspicion and detraction, that these remarks have more special reference.

So much is the world governed by appearances, that when what is termed "Fortune" smiles, or seems to smile, on man, a thousand excellencies and meritorious properties are discovered, which would, in all probability, have remained hidden or unappreciated, had his circumstances been of a contrary character; talent and capabilities are brought into conspicuous observation; he is often drawn into public offices, and public honours are bestowed. The same principle is carried on in the church, when one of its members appears to be blessed by Providence, when the Lord seems to command "a blessing on his storehouses, and in all he setteth his hand unto;" "when he maketh him plenteous in goods and cattle;" more especially if these be accom-

panied with talents for public usefulness; then he begins to occupy a different station in the regards of his fellow-men; their opinions of him become more elevated; he is invited forward into more active service, where the affairs of the church are concerned, he is considered eligible for holding various prominent and responsible situations, duties devolve on him, and performances are expected from him; and, as he is thus involved in the interests and responsibilities of that section of Christ's church of which he is a member, the eye of observation is raised to him; his character seems to have become public property, and men unceremoniously perambulate its boundaries, survey it in all its length and breadth, and make measurements and calculations accordingly. His mode of acting, his style of living, the amount and manner of his benefactions, his observations, his opinions, his dress and equipage, are made the subjects of public cognizance, too often unnecessarily and censoriously. It is also a truth that persons of this class, are frequently the objects of envy and misrepresentation amongst those of their brethren and fellow-labourers whose path is less prosperous; unjust and unchristian analogies or comparisons are drawn, and past and present circumstances contrasted.—Illiberal and foolish remarks are passed regarding their conduct; occurrences and deeds are brought out and dilated on, and frequently magnified into gross acts of inconsistency, or imprudence, or arrogance, which really in themselves were natural and unintentional.

Distortion is so perpetually wandering abroad amongst all classes of society, that Truth is seldom seen, and facts rarely appear in their native colours. So much are they, by the detailer, draped and enveloped in the fantasies of the imagination, that to form right opinions, and to come to just conclusions from observations made, and statements exhibited, respecting character and conduct, is extremely difficult. Amongst human beings, generally, how recklessly and unceremoniously are comments made, facts magnified, and observations, in themselves harmless and unintentional, enlarged upon without the least sympathy!

It is therefore highly necessary that the conduct of those thus raised, by the mercy of Providence, somewhat above the generality of those with whom they are connected, should be marked by caution and prudence, and that their character should have stamped on it, broadly and prominently, the image of the meek and lowly Jesus.

Temporal blessings are talents; and it is intended they should produce as large an amount of interest as any other gifts. Perhaps few talents can so readily be brought into practical and visible exercise. There is less exertion of intellect required; the path is bright, and broad, and plain to the possessors of them; the world is their circuit: its occupants are the subjects of their care; those who dwell more immediately within the range of their personal knowledge or connexion, are to be benefited by them, temporally and spiritually. Whenever an opening offers for disinterested benevolence, there they are to act. They are left guardians of the lonely widow and desolate orphan. They are required to be the assistants of that honest, yet harassed, Christian, who has so often to work his way amid the obstacles and difficulties of pecuniary embarrassments: such a one it is their office to benefit and console by their advice and patronage.

How many sincere professors of the religion of the lowly Saviour would shine out brilliantly before the world, were they in their temporal affairs aided by the disinterested exertions of their richer brethren in Christ! But, too frequently overlooked and contemned, the pious poor man prefers to seek assistance from the worldling, and cheerfully receives from him those favours

and bounties which, from a brother in Christ, would not be bestowed without many suspicions and mortifying interrogatories and superciliously discouraging remarks.

To a Christian, surrounded by temporal successes, a thousand opportunities are daily arising in which he may be found acting for the glory of God. Having the means to act, not only are those placed within the range of his more immediate observation to be the objects of his care, but the world at large.

The various institutions which dignify the moral and Christian world are channels through which his bounties must flow "to the ends of the earth." The more ample his means for doing good, the more extensive must be his plans for the welfare of his fellow-creatures. If his heart be under the influence of conscientious principles, and Christ-like affections and sympathies, he will feel a delight in thus dispensing his bounties to the world.

But such temporal privileges, bringing with them, as they do, so many duties and responsibilities, require that they be expended and improved in the true spirit of the Gospel of Christ.

As the Christian moves through those various paths of diffusive and itinerating philanthropy, as he fulfils those peculiar duties assigned him by Providence, he must throw into vigorous exercise a host of moral excellencies in character, conversation, disposition. The power of grace, its efficiency in regulating the life and rectifying the heart, must be seen, that thus he may be raised as a model on which the world may gaze with pleasure, and which they may copy to their own profit, and to the glory of God.

In receiving temporal blessings, the Christian ought to assume the attitude of abeyance, reposing in child-like simplicity and submission, attentively waiting the direction of the divine will, as to how he must act, and how dispose of those benefactions, of the power of bestowing which he is made the steward.

A spirit of prayer ought also to accompany these exercises, or they will not be rightly and profitably appropriated. Deep emotions of prayer heaving the bosom, filling the soul, and engaging the thought, will keep the mind in a proper frame, and prevent that undue preponderance of buoyancy and self-esteem, which is too frequently the consequence of temporal prosperity. There must be prayer for larger influences of the Holy Spirit, his gifts and graces; prayer for an increase of humility and sincerity; prayer for a more even and calm deportment in pursuing the daily walks of life; prayer for enlightened and scriptural views and feelings, that corresponding actions may be exhibited; prayer for such habitual self-control as will enable the recipient to retain these bestowments of temporal blessings in their subordinate station, as of a secondary nature, and not worthy any estimation when placed in comparison with those spiritual blessings which he, as the disciple of Christ, is privileged to possess.

In receiving temporal blessings, there should be a complete annihilation of self, save as the instrument in the hands of God; for He is the first moving Cause, and man has no right to arrogate to himself any credit, neither can he ascribe his success to the might of his own arm, or to his own wisdom. He is but an agent, amenable to a higher Power. They ought to be received in singleness of heart as his gifts; the manifestations of rich goodness and marvellous loving-kindness, which are permitted to alight on the Christian, that he may more amply display the glory of God, by diffusing around him a delicious and heaven-derived fragrance of love; that so wherever he moves, the child of God, the heir of heaven, the companion in spirit of saints and angels, may shine with light so evidently divine, that not the man, high