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SERMON XXXI.*

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THE PROSPERITY OF THE CHURCH.

PSALM 122:6—*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.*

IN the scriptures of the Old Testament much is said concerning the city of Jerusalem, and many and great encomiums are bestowed upon it. And in many respects it was certainly greatly distinguished and favored above all other cities. In the days of David, Jerusalem was wrested from the Jebusites, and made the seat of government; and from that time, ever after it was the capitol of Judea. It was the royal city, the residence of the kings of Judah, the centre of their political union, and the place where justice was administered. "There were set the thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David." And among the kings, who reigned in Jerusalem, were some of the best that ever swayed a sceptre. As the capitol of the kingdom, the centre of their political union, and the seat of justice, it was dear to Israel.

But it was especially dear to them, as the *Holy City*. There was the temple, the place of their solemnities. There was a resting place for the ark, the symbol of the divine presence and glory, where Jehovah, in a special manner, manifested his presence. Thither the tribes of the Lord went up to worship, to receive instruction from the divine testimonies, and offer their prayers and praises. In this respect, it was the city of God, the city which, above all others, he had chosen for himself. It was the seat of his church, the place of his worship, and of his more immediate presence; and this it was that made Jerusalem so beautiful and glorious in the eyes of Israel, especially of those in

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Israel who loved God, and took pleasure in his worship. To pray for the peace of Jerusalem, then, was to pray for the peace of God's church, of which Jerusalem was then the seat.

Jerusalem of old, was typical of the christian church; and the solemnities of Israel, were equivalent to our public ordinances, and emblematical of that worship which we owe God through Jesus Christ. The name is therefore in the scriptures figuratively transferred to the christian church, embracing the redeemed of all nations,—Jews, and Gentiles. In this sense we find the name Jerusalem frequently used, as designating the church of Christ, or the church as it now exists, under the reign of the Messiah. To pray for the peace of Jerusalem, then, is to pray for the peace of the Redeemer's kingdom, or of the church of Christ,—a duty as important and binding on God's people now, as it was in the days of David.

The term peace, as used by the sacred writers, has several significations. In its literal and most general acceptation it means "respite from war;" also quiet, and rest from distress and trouble. Sometimes it is used to signify *reconciliation*. In this sense it is frequently used in the New Testament, to express our reconciliation to God, through faith in the blood of Christ, and to denote the fruit of that reconciliation, which is "*peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" It is also used to denote *general prosperity and happiness*. In this sense the Jews were in the constant habit of using the word. Their ordinary mode of salutation was, "Peace be with you," by which they meant to express their desire for the general prosperity and happiness of their friends. In this last sense,—as denoting general prosperity,—the word may be understood in our text.

The duty enjoined in the text, then, is this, "*To pray for the prosperity of the church.*" And in further addressing you, I will now, in the

First place, consider, what is implied in the prosperity of the church, or, what is necessary in order to its prosperity; and

Second, Mention some reasons why we should pray for this.

I. *What is implied in the prosperity of the church, or, what is necessary in order to its prosperity?*

This inquiry opens before us a very wide field for investigation; but on the present occasion I shall confine myself to a few leading particulars, and will discuss them, with as much brevity as is consistent with a distinct view of the subject.

1. The first thing I notice, as connected with the prosperity of the church, is *external tranquillity, or freedom from oppression and persecution*. Whether worldly favor and patronage are conducive to the church's welfare, would admit of a question. The history of the church, I believe, furnishes but little evidence of good resulting to her from an alliance with the world; but there is no want of evidence to show that she has been most deeply injured by such alliance. The world can hardly extend its favors, without imparting something of its spirit; and the evil resulting from the latter, when the church has been patronized by the world, has generally been found greatly to overbalance the good derived from the former.

Christ's kingdom is not of this world. In its spirit, its maxims, and its laws, it is not only different from the world, but directly opposed to it; and the more distinct it is from the world, the more it has generally been found to prosper. But though not of the world, the church is in the world, and so connected with it, or situated in relation to it, that her interests may be affected, and seriously affected, by the feelings and conduct of the world towards her. Worldly influence and power may be used, and often have been used, to distract, oppress, and persecute the church; and thus injure her peace or prosperity. I am aware that the spirituality of the church, which is her life, may be injured by uninterrupted tranquillity; and that secular oppression and persecution have been made conducive to her prosperity. This was remarkably the case in the early ages of the christian church. Persecution dispersed abroad the disciples of Christ, and into all places whither they were driven they carried the gospel. Thus the good seed of the word was scattered, the gospel was more extensively preached, and the boundaries of the church greatly extended.

The cruelties, also, inflicted on christians, their martyrdom, and their patience and calm resignation under such severe and cruel sufferings, made a deep impression on others, led them to examine more carefully a system which could produce such astonishing effects, and brought them in many instances to enlist under the standard of Christ;

so that it was literally true, that "the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church." And in later times, in the reformation from Popery, the persecution of christians was in many instances made subservient to the prosperity of the church. But all these good effects were produced, not by persecution itself, but by the providence of God overruling this cruel and wicked violence, contrary to its natural tendency, for the good of his cause. It is the province of God to bring order out of confusion, light out of darkness, good out of evil, and to make even "the wrath of man to praise him." He can make all things work for the good of his cause, and the prosperity of his kingdom. As in the natural world, hurricanes and storms, which are serious evils in themselves, are made to purify the atmosphere, and in this way are often productive of great good; so, also, God can make moral convulsions and rage against his spiritual kingdom, subservient to the health and prosperity of his church. Still, these are evils; and God's providence overruling them for good does not at all change their nature—they are evils still; and external tranquillity, or peace, is a great blessing.

It leaves the members of Christ's house free to establish and maintain that order, which is essential to its prosperity. It affords an opportunity for that regular instruction, which has an inseparable connection with the church's improvement. And it leaves the church at liberty to devise and execute plans for its extension and growth. In every respect it is a blessing, to be earnestly desired, and prayed for. It is mentioned as one of the peculiar blessings which will be enjoyed by the church in the days of her millennial prosperity and glory. Then, God's people "shall dwell in peaceable habitations, and in sure dwellings, and quiet resting places;" then, "there shall be none to disturb and make afraid in all the holy mountain of our God."

It is our privilege, my beloved brethren, to live where the most entire religious toleration is enjoyed. The church in the midst of us is not checked in its progress by civil opposition, or persecution. That the holy cause of the Redeemer has its enemies here, is not to be doubted; and that the progress of this cause is viewed with jealousy, and feelings of the most decided hostility by some among us, who hate every thing that is good, there can be as little doubt. But, blessed be God, such men are restrained, and we are permitted "to sit under our own vines, and our own fig trees," and to worship God according to the dictates of our own consciences, while "there is none to disturb

or make us afraid." For this favor we cannot be sufficiently thankful. And as we value the prosperity of the church we should pray that this blessing of peace with all around may be continued to her, even to the latest generation; that God would ever "make even her enemies to be at peace with her," and that her children may "live peaceably with all men."

2. *Internal peace and unity* are essential to the prosperity of the church. I make a difference here, between *peace*, or *tranquillity*, and *unity*, because they are not always found together, in the sense in which I use the term *unity*. By internal peace or tranquillity, I mean, a freedom from all divisions and dissensions; that christians live together in harmony, loving one another. By unity, I mean, not only a oneness of feeling, and affection, but also concert in action; that they be "of one heart, and one mind," to pray, and labor together, for the cause of Christ. Now we know there may be the most perfect peace, or tranquillity, in the church—that is, there may be no divisions or dissensions, but the most entire harmony among the members,—where there is a most deplorable want of every thing like that *unity* in prayer and effort which is inseparably connected with the prosperity of Christ's cause. But both these are essential to the prosperity of the church.

Christ Jesus, the great Head of the church, is the "Prince of peace." His kingdom is a "kingdom of peace;" his subjects are "called to peace;" and they are strictly enjoined to be "of one mind," and live in peace. They being many are *one body*, and in this *one body*, there should be but *one heart*, and *one way*. All the members of Christ's body, in the bond of love, and the spirit of peace, should "walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing." That christian brethren should "fall out by the way;" that the church of God should be torn by discord, and rent by divisions; that the members of Christ's family should wrangle, and contend, and quarrel, and devour one another; while it affords gratification to their enemies, must bring a reproach on their profession, and inflict a deep wound on the cause of their Lord. Thus do they cast a stumbling-block, in the way of others, and expose themselves to the frowns and chastisements of their heavenly Father. Nothing, dear brethren, is more destructive to the prosperity of the church, than internal discord. Let but a spirit of jealousy and contention go forth among christians—no matter about what they contend—and religion ceases to prosper, the

enemy triumphs, the church is in sackcloth. Christian brethren, do you love the kingdom of the Redeemer? Do you love your own church, and desire its prosperity? Then live in peace; shut your ears and close your eyes against every thing that would excite the spirit of jealousy or discord. Place a double guard over your lips, that nothing escape you which can possibly lead to strife. Remember, the great art of making and preserving peace consists, principally, in abstaining from that which gives offence and engenders strife*. Then avoid every thing that can create dissensions and cultivate a spirit of peace; and, as you value the prosperity of the church, pray that "peace may be within her walls."

But it is not sufficient that there be peace, or harmony in the church; oneness of feeling in regard to her great and important interests, and unity of effort to promote these interests, are essential to her prosperity. *Unity is the beauty, and strength of the church.* Where there is this agreement in desire and prayer, it is effectual in obtaining the divine blessing; and when the church is perfectly united, in efforts to advance the cause of the Redeemer, that cause will go forward. Union here, emphatically, is strength. It is powerful, both with God and man. Of the primitive christians, it is said, "they were of one heart, and one soul." They were "of one accord" in prayer, and in action. There was among them *perfect agreement*; and the consequence was "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." "Great numbers believed, and turned unto the Lord." The cause of Christ rapidly advanced. And the same effects would still be seen, were there the same perfect agreement among christians. Yes, my brethren, if christians in our own widely extended, and much loved church were thus of one heart, and one mind; if there were among us this perfect agreement in faith, in prayer, and in action, we should soon witness the glorious effects, in the conversion of many souls, and the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, in our land and through our world. Pray, then, for *unity* in the church. Pray that believers now, as in former days, may be "of one accord,"—and then the church will prosper.

3. *Purity* is essential to the prosperity of the church. In this consists her chief beauty, and glory; and whatever else she may have, if she have not purity, or holiness, she cannot prosper.

Purity in doctrine is essential to the prosperity of the church. The

*See 48th page.

church is founded in truth; and truth is the great instrument, which is used by the Holy Spirit in her growth and establishment. It is by the truth instrumentally that men are converted to God. "The law of the Lord," by which is meant in this passage, his truth, "is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." The scriptures uniformly make faith, or belief of the truth, essential to salvation; and it is by the truth, instrumentally, that believers are sanctified and comforted, and "nourished to eternal life;" and the truth of God will be the great instrument used in the conversion of the nations, and the consequent enlargement and glory of the church. Jehovah will send forth his light and his truth, and establish his kingdom throughout the world. It is of vital importance, then, to the church, that her doctrines be kept pure; that she be free from all heresy, and every error. God will never own, as the instrument of building up his church, that which opposes his word; and it is not more certain, that truth is the great means of the sanctification, and salvation of men, than it is, that error has a natural and direct tendency to delude, corrupt, and destroy them. Error in doctrine, my brethren, which always necessarily leads to error in practice, has been in all ages of the church, one of the most powerful engines in the hands of Satan, to mar the beauty, and destroy the prosperity of Zion.

But in order to advance the prosperity of the church, it is not sufficient that she be kept free from false doctrines; if the truth be withheld, she suffers in her most important interests. A church may be free from gross errors, and yet, in her instructions, have very little, or even nothing of the great and essential doctrines of the gospel. The evil in this case is, not that errors are inculcated, but that truth is withheld; and in either case, her interests are sacrificed. For her prosperity, she needs the whole system of divine truth, which her Master has committed to her. The great doctrines of the cross, in all their simplicity, and purity, as they are found in the living oracles, are necessary to the growth, and prosperity of the church. These doctrines are her life; they are the food of her children, and she cannot thrive without them. In praying for the prosperity of the church, then, pray that she may be purified from all false, polluting doctrines, and that she may have the truth, in all its purity, simplicity, and fulness.

Purity, or holiness, in her members, is also essential to the pros-

perity of the church. It was the prayer of the Psalmist, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." God's real people,—and all the members of his church should be his real people,—are the subjects of a holy beauty, or of the "beauty of holiness." They are comely through his comeliness: and powerful are the charms of genuine piety; it disarms malignity itself, and extorts admiration, even from those who hate it. I repeat it, my brethren, there is an amazing power in genuine piety; and it is when the disciples of Christ are found drinking in his spirit, and walking in the way of his commandments, that the church appears "beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, and terrible" to all her enemies "as an army with banners." Of the primitive christians, it is said, "walking in the fear of the Lord, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost," they were multiplied. They exhibited in their lives the purity and the excellency of religion—and the consequence was, others were won over to them, and the church increased and prospered. And the same effect would still follow, if the members of Christ's church exhibited the same purity, and conscientious regard to his commandments.

Nothing, my friends, has more deeply injured the cause of religion than the ungodly lives of professors. The professed children of the church have, in this way, more deeply injured her prosperity than the whole host of her enemies combined. Would we then promote the prosperity of Zion, let it be our unceasing prayer, "that her children may all be righteous;" that they may all "walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost."

Purity in her sacraments, has also a very intimate connection with the prosperity of the church. By the admission of unholy, or unregenerate persons, to the sealing ordinances of the church, we certainly greatly endanger her peace, and check her prosperity. We thus receive into her bosom those who love not her king, relish not her spiritual provisions, and who cannot feel a deep concern for her real interests. But this is not all: by the admission of such, God's holy ordinances are profaned, and the seals of his covenant prostituted. These seals are committed to the church. They are a sacred deposit in her hands, and by suffering the seals to be laid hold of by those who obviously have no interest in the covenant, the church is unfaithful to her solemn trust, and exposes herself to the displeasure of her king and head: and how can she hope to prosper, when her Lord is displeased, and frowns upon her! I am satisfied, my friends, by the

admission of unholy men to her communion, by prostituting the seals of the covenant, the church has been deeply injured, and many souls ruined forever. Pray, then, that the sacraments of the church may be kept pure.

Purity in discipline is also essential to the prosperity of the church. Without discipline, in the present state of human nature, no society can prosper. Where this is neglected, there will, of necessity, be disorder, and every evil work: and as the prosperity of the church more especially depends on its order and purity, the necessity of a wise and faithful discipline must be apparent to all. To be faithful in this matter, I know, brethren, requires much self-denial, and often a most painful sacrifice of feeling, on the part of those to whom this difficult and trying work is committed. But painful as this work is, it must be done, or the cause of Christ must suffer. The order of God's house must be maintained or the church cannot prosper. Pray, then, that purity in the discipline of the church may be maintained. In short, pray for the *purity* of the church in all her ministrations, and concerns; that she may shine forth in all the beauties of holiness, "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

4. Finally, *The presence of Christ by his Spirit* is essential, *absolutely essential*, to the prosperity of the church. Without the gracious presence of her King, and Head, whatever may be the external or internal state of the church, she cannot prosper. "Without me," says Christ, "ye can do nothing." Now this is true, not only of every individual christian, but of every particular church, and of the church at large. It is the presence of Christ by his Spirit, which gives power to the word, and to ordinances, which makes the means of grace effectual to the conversion of sinners, and the sanctification of believers. It is this, which makes religion flourish, which gives spirituality and strength and comfort to God's people, and brings the impenitent to feel their guilt, and fly to the Saviour. Deprived of the special presence of Christ by his Spirit, God's people sink down into coldness and formality, religion will decline and sinners must and will perish. In praying for the prosperity of the church, then, brethren, pray, *especially*, that she may enjoy the presence of Christ, and the influences of his Spirit; that the Spirit of the Lord may be poured out upon her from on high. "Then shall her peace be as a river, and her righteousness as the waves of the sea."

Such are some of the things necessary to the prosperity of the church, and for which the friends of Zion are bound to pray. But why should we be so much concerned for the church? why so earnest in praying for her prosperity?

II. I proceed now to answer these inquiries, by mentioning, under our second head, *some reasons why we should pray for the prosperity of the church.*

And here I must be brief.

1. Christians ought to pray for the "peace of Jerusalem," the prosperity of the church, for the sake of their brethren of Christ's family, whose dearest interests are identified with those of Zion. This the Psalmist mentions, as a motive which had influence with him. "For my brethren and companions' sake I will now say, peace be within thee." True religion is not selfish, or contracted. It teaches and disposes us to embrace, in our desires and prayers, a fallen world; to "do good unto all men, but especially to them who are of the household of faith." Christians are bound to each other by very strong and tender ties. Although divided into many parts, and these known by different names, the church of Christ is one, and all true believers have a common interest and feeling; they should therefore love one another, and in every possible way seek each other's good: and as far as they have the spirit of their Master, they will do this. In praying for the prosperity of the church, we pray for the peace and comfort, the sanctification, and the salvation of the whole and every member of the family of Jesus; and as far as we feel an interest in the good of our brethren, we have in this a cogent motive to pray for the "peace of Jerusalem."

2. A still more important reason why we should pray for the prosperity of the church, is,

The glory of God is intimately connected with her prosperity. God's glory appears, in all his works, but, especially in his work of redemption. Here we have exhibited the glory of his nature. It is by the church, the apostle tells us, the manifold wisdom, or glory of God, is made known even to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. It is in the redemption and sanctification of his people, that the perfections of Jehovah are most illustriously displayed. The

cause of his church is that in which God himself is most deeply interested. It is the cause in which his Son embarked, and in which he shed his blood; the cause in which all the energies of the Holy Spirit are pledged; to the success of which angels delight to minister, and the triumph of which will swell the anthems of Heaven through eternity. When God builds up Zion, then, especially, does he appear in his glory. Every conversion of a sinner, every accession to the cause of Immanuel, brings glory to God. Every temptation resisted, every lust subdued, and every advance believers make in holiness, glorifies God. In short, just in proportion as the cause of truth and righteousness advance, or the church prospers, God is glorified in our world. If we desire that God should be honored, then, pray for the prosperity of Zion.

3. Once more. The best interests of the human family are identified with the prosperity of the church.

The church of Jesus Christ is the strength and safety, as well as the glory of our world. It is for the sake of the church the world is preserved. Had not God a people, to be prepared here for his heavenly kingdom, this earth, groaning under the guilt of its inhabitants, and stained as it is with the blood of God's own Son, would soon become the prey of destruction. And we have reason from scripture to believe the removal to glory, of the last of God's redeemed people, will be the signal for the complete destruction of our globe.

A pure gospel church, in its salutary influence on the temporal prosperity of a people, is an invaluable treasure to any community. It is their best security against destructive vices; the best cement of society; and the secret pledge of even worldly prosperity.

But in the prosperity of Christ's kingdom, are involved interests infinitely more important and valuable, than the temporal interests of a world. The salvation of the soul is concerned here. Estimate, if you can, brethren, the value of a single soul. Think of the price paid for its redemption, "The blood of God's incarnate Son." Think of its endless duration; its ever increasing powers, and susceptibilities; and the amount of enjoyment, or pain, which will be its certain portion in eternity, and then say, whether its value was overrated by Him who declared it to be worth more than a world. And when you have attempted to fix the value of a single undying spirit, then recollect how many such souls, how many millions of immortal

spirits, there are in our world, whose salvation is identified with the progress of true religion, and you may be able to understand something of that infinite weight of motive which urges you, and urges every lover of God, and of his Christ, to pray for the prosperity of the Church.

Such is a specimen of the host of motives that urge every true believer to pray for the prosperity of Zion. The glory of our redeeming God; the sanctification and comfort of his redeemed people, and the interests of a world lying in sin, and hastening to judgment, all urge us, with a holy importunity, to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem."

INFERENCES.

1. We may learn from this subject, what *object* should be *first* in the mind and heart of every christian. *The prosperity of the church*, the advancement of the cause of truth and righteousness is the one great object, on which every renewed mind, every sanctified heart, should fix, and dwell, with the most constant and intense interest. In the prosperity of the church, we have seen, are involved, the glory of God, the comfort of his redeemed people, and the best interests of our whole race. Jerusalem, or the church, is not only "the delight of our God, and the joy of his people." It is "the glory of the whole earth."

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem to my chief joys." This should be the feeling, this the language of every renewed mind. The cause of Jesus Christ with him should be *first*, the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom paramount to all other interests. In *grandeur*, there is nothing in our world comparable to the kingdom of our Immanuel; and in *importance*, what other interest will you bring into competition with it? This is the great interest of men, compared with which, every thing else on earth is lighter than vanity. This one object, then, brethren, the kingdom of Jesus Christ, should absorb every renewed mind, and fill every believing heart, and call forth every energy of the christian.

2. From this subject we may learn in *what way* we may contribute

our share in promoting the prosperity of the church. The church, we know, depends for its prosperity entirely on God. He alone has power to convert a single soul. By his Spirit alone are believers sanctified, and Zion beautified and enlarged. This is a very important truth, implied and taught in our text, That in God alone are found the sources of Zion's prosperity; the very duty of praying for the prosperity of Zion, implies that all the springs of her prosperity are in God.

But while it is true, that the church depends for its prosperity entirely on God, and He alone can make religion flourish; it is also true, in building up and extending his kingdom in the world, God makes use of means. In this work He is pleased, in infinite condescension and kindness, to make use of the instrumentality of his people.

We have noticed a few things essential to the church's prosperity. *Peace* without, and *harmony* within; *unity*, or oneness in faith, in prayer, and in effort, among the ministers, and members of the church; *purity* in her doctrines; *holiness* in her members, a sacred guarding of her ordinances, and a wise and salutary discipline, and above all, the presence of Christ by his Spirit, are essential to the prosperity of Zion. By promoting these, then, that is, by promoting the purity, peace, and order of the church, and by being much engaged in believing, importunate prayer to God, for the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are instrumental, in promoting the true interests, the prosperity of Zion. It is then by living up to our high and holy vocation; by adhering strictly to the plain, and important truths of God's word; by cultivating a spirit of meekness and kindness, and brotherly love; by maintaining the order of God's house; and by communion with God in prayer, that we contribute essentially to the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. Beloved brethren, do we desire to see that kingdom advanced? do we wish to exert an instrumentality in urging its onward march? Let us evince this desire by our love to the truth, by our love to the brethren, by our love to the order of God's house, by a spirit of self-denial, and by a wise, and holy, and devoted zeal for the honor of our Redeemer, and the salvation of the souls of men.

Let us leave to others the unholy work of distracting, and dividing, and desolating the church, by false doctrines, or a self-sufficient, con-

tentious spirit. Be it our delightful work to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem," and by every possible effort promote her purity, her order, her prosperity.

3. *Finally*, In view of this subject, what a fearful responsibility rests on this "General Assembly!" Composed, as this General Assembly is, of ministers and officers in the church, into whose hands God has, in a special manner, committed the interests of his Zion, and on whom, more especially, he has devolved the great work of building up, and enlarging the Redeemer's kingdom,—under what a weight of responsibility do we come together? Why have we come hither? What is the object of our meeting? For what purpose have these ministers, and these elders left their homes, and from all parts of our land assembled in this place of holy convocation?

The answer to this question is easily given: We have met in General Assembly, to promote the interests of Zion,—to lay plans and adopt measures for advancing the prosperity of the church. We profess to have no other object. We should have no other, in assembling here. Our very meeting together, brethren, for such an object, should call forth the best affections of the heart, and put up the mind to high thoughts, and noble conceptions. There is an unspeakable *grandeur* in the very idea of such a convocation as this—a convocation of the ministers of Jesus Christ, and of the representatives of his church, assembled to deliberate on subjects connected with the prosperity of his kingdom, and the interests of immortal souls. Why, brethren, it is not the temporary interests of worms of the dust—not the concerns of a perishing world, that claim our attention here. It is the concerns of many, very many, immortal souls; the interests of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. We come here, not to promote the interests of a party, but to employ our best instrumentality in advancing the magnificent and glorious designs of divine mercy in the world; and the results of this meeting, we have reason to believe, will be felt in eternity. It will have an influence, either salutary or the reverse, on the churches, and on souls, through the whole extent of our land. We come together under circumstances of deep and thrilling interest. The world is in agitation; the church is in motion. Every careful observer of the signs of the times must feel that this is no ordinary period. In the present aspect of things, both in the church and in the world, while there are many things to encourage and

animate the friends of the Redeemer, there is also much to alarm and distress; there are prominent signs, both of good and evil, and it will be our part to do all we can to accomplish the promised good, and guard against the threatening evil.

We act here, in view of many witnesses. God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, has his eye on this Assembly. Angels, doubtless, are viewing it with intense interest. The church throughout our land, not only our own denomination, but other denominations of professing christians, are looking to this Assembly with deep and thrilling interest.

Infidels, and errorists of all descriptions, have their eye fixed upon us, and are closely watching us.

An interest in the proceedings of this Assembly is felt far beyond the limits of our own country. From across the waters, which separate us from the old world, many an anxious eye turns towards this Assembly, and many a renewed heart has breathed a prayer in our behalf.

Under what an amazing weight of responsibility, then, do we act! Verily, beloved brethren, we need large supplies of wisdom and of grace to meet our responsibility here. Oh! that we all felt this, and that every heart were engaged in prayer to Him, who is the fountain of wisdom, and the source of grace, to grant us the supplies we need.

Brethren, ministers of the gospel, like others, are dying men. We, who are here now, will never all meet in "General Assembly" again, until we meet in one, very differently organized, and held for a very different purpose. What we have to do to advance the prosperity of the church, must be done quickly. *Here* is our opportunity; *now* is our time.

Let us, then, fix our eye and our heart on one single object—"The prosperity of Zion,"—and feeling that our only hope, for either receiving or doing good, is in God, let our united, believing, importunate prayer ascend to his throne. Let the whole, and every part of our business, be commenced, and prosecuted, and ended in prayer. And may God of his infinite mercy grant to every member of this body, a large supply of that "wisdom which is from above; which is, first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

And may our covenant Jehovah prosper his own blessed cause.
Amen.

EDITOR'S NOTE.

The sin of disturbing the peace of the church, often originates with those who consider their opponents as especially guilty of neglecting the excellent advice of our author. The man who adopts the *language* of error, in explaining the *essential* doctrines of the branch of the church with which he is connected; or, neglects her *important* usages, is laying a foundation for discord. He may think it is "lawful," to use any phraseology in expressing his views, or engage in any speculations, so long as he holds the doctrines of her standards. But even this, is not always "expedient."—(See 1 Cor. 10:23—32.) By so doing he may offend his "weak brother;" he may thus excite suspicions; he may cause others who do not know his real sentiments, to oppose him *conscientiously*; he may promote a "schism" in the church, by an unwillingness to relinquish *modes* of explanation, and his philosophy, which (he says) conveys no different ideas from the obvious meaning of the standards.

He may continue the *causes* of controversy by recklessly continuing his unwarranted interpretations, by his apparent neglect of ecclesiastical order, by ridiculing or treating his brethren unkindly, by giving a *preference* to other institutions than those peculiar to the branch of the church whose "unity" and "prosperity" he has voluntarily pledged himself to "study" and promote. In our opinion, such a person (but especially *fundamental* errorists) as well as those who contend with their brethren about *small matters*, destroy the peace of the church. But we will cease to express our judgment, and give a timely extract from the "pastoral letter" of the General Assembly of 1817, found in the "Digest," page 112.

"Dear brethren, be UNITED AMONG YOURSELVES. If you desire to profit by your spiritual privileges; if you hope to be instrumental in promoting the cause of Christ, or to be honored with his blessing; cherish harmony of affection, and union of effort. Besides the common bonds of christian love, which unite the great family of believers; the ministers and members of the Presbyterian church are cemented by a compact which every honest man cannot fail to appreciate. We mean the "Confession of Faith" of our church. While we believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only infallible rule of faith and practice, we do also, if we deal faithfully with God and man, *sincerely* receive and adopt this Confession, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. Let us adhere to this standard with fidelity; and endeavor to transmit to our children *pure* and *undefiled*, a treasure, which our fathers at great expense have, under God, bequeathed to us. But while we hold fast the *form of sound words* which we have received, let us guard against indulging a spirit of controversy, than which few things are more unfriendly to the life and power of godliness. It is never necessary to sacrifice charity, in order to maintain faith and hope. That differences of opinion, acknowledged on all hands, to be of the minor class, may and ought to be tolerated, among those who are agreed in great and leading views of Divine truth, is a principle on which the godly have so long and so generally acted, that it seems unnecessary, at the present day, to seek arguments for its support. Our Fathers, in early periods of the history of our church, had their peculiarities and diversities of opinion; which yet, however did not prevent them from loving one another, from cordially acting together; and by their united prayers and exertions, transmitting to us a goodly inheritance. Let us emulate their moderation and forbearance, and we may hope to be favored with more than their success.

The great adversary will, no doubt, be disposed to sow the seeds of discord and division among you. But resist him in this, as well as all his other insidious efforts. Surely those who can come together on the great principles of our public Standards, however they may differ on non-essential points, ought not to separate, or to indulge bitterness or prejudice against each other. Dear brethren, *let there be no divisions among you; but be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. Follow the things which make for peace, and the things whereby ye may edify one another. Behold how good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! Brethren, farewell, love one another; for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. Be of one mind; live in peace, and the God of love and of peace shall be with you. AMEN!"*