

Hosea 7:9 (Joseph Denham Smith) 53823

Christian Truth: Volume 25, Gray Hairs: Spiritual Decay

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"Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." Hos. 7:9.

"Sin's hurtful when perceived; When not perceived 'tis worse; Unseen or seen it dwells within, And works by fraud or force."

The gray hairs primarily regard what is national and historical in Israel, and are sadly true to this hour, as seen by their long spiritual decay, of which they are ignorant. The principles involved apply to us.

Gray hairs appropriately mantle the brow of age, and in the way of righteousness are a crown of glory. They tell us that our earthly days are passing away, that the spring time and, it may be, the summer of life are gone. Men vainly seek to alter them, and for a time may seem to succeed. But it is only for a while; the development of artificial color may indeed tamper with the appearance, but cannot arrest the years, the mark of whose fingers lies silvered at the roots. How happy the thought—there need be nothing answering to this in our spiritual life.. Grace is ever above nature. Hence, nature speaks of stones, but grace of lively or living stones. Nature shows how the outward man may, perish, but grace tells of the inward man being renewed day by day.

When God speaks to the heart and tells us what grace is, as with penitent and restored Ephraim, a divine renewal comes, so that away go the gray hairs, the idols, and all the other things that have come between us and God; and we can say, Our "youth is renewed like the eagle's." "He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Oh, what obligation, are we under that we should live to Him who so speaks to Us, and that we should abhor, everything that would grieve Him or draw from Him this tender flow of lamentation—"Gray hairs are here and there" (literally, sprinkled) "upon him, yet he knoweth not." But note, it is evil which these words indicate. It is a moral decay which comes imperceptibly, even as the source is quite unseen. All such decays begin in the inner man. It is in the heart that there is departure from the living God.

It may root, at its beginning, in a want of dependence on God. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." David in all probability was never more satisfied with himself than previous to his sin; and Peter was never more confident with a fleshly confidence than before his fall. The decay sets in before the effects become visible.

Many things will produce it; and first, as reminded by our history, an undue mingling with the world will bring it on. What brought on this decay in Israel was mixing with the heathen, as we may say, mixing with the world. God had told Moses that they were to keep separate. If not, they would intermarry, and if they intermarried they would have introduced among them the gods of those to whom they were married, all which took place till they themselves became "joined to idols." It is the same now; voluntarily mixing with the world is sure to bring evil. The springs of life become dried up. Could you have a worldly scene and prayer? No! A worldly company and the Word of God- the Savior the theme? No! Could any child of God have the courage of his opinions and be courted by the godless ones of this world? No! Could such a one retain his peace and joy as a child of God? No; he may glide along the current of these new worldly circumstances with a conscience seared as to his sin, like Ephraim. "Gray hairs are... upon him, yet he knoweth not." But he has no peace, no joy.

Second, some sin may cause this decay. It may be a thing, or it may be a person, but it is sin, and it cleaves to us, comes between God and our souls, and is an idol which divides our affections from God. It may be unbelief or a temptation ever seeking to succeed. If either of these be allowed, the result must be decay in the spiritual life.

The idol of our fancy may be something lovely-some habit which has taken the place of God—some attraction or attainment on which pride sits, or some satisfaction of self.

Third, a neglect of the Word will produce it. No one can even slight it without suffering loss. Backsliding most frequently has its beginning here. Decay must come where there is want. Hence, take the nourishment from the newborn babe, and it will die. Can the oldest or strongest live without their necessary food? How, unless fed by the Word, are we fitted for service or trial or conflict with the enemy? When the soul is not fed, we are more fitted for the hospital than the battlefield. The Word is the only true aliment for the soul, made such by the Spirit of God, whose delight is to use it for our own good. "If I would be filled with the Spirit," said the devoted McCheyne, "I must read my Bible more, pray more, and watch more. In the morning I must see the face of God before I see the face of man, or undertake any duty." It is the noblest science to know how to live in hourly communion with God in Christ. Why need we pine in want when the supply is so vast? The Word leads to Christ, Christ to God. Hence the supply is infinite; and, joined to Him, how available it is as well as infinite.

Fourth, neglect of communion brings decay. Are you saying with Job, It is not with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shined upon me? (Job 29:2, 3.) Or with Cowper-

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?"

Confession there may be, but not blessedness, not communion; communion is more than simple prayer. It is that which we enjoy as common between ourselves and God; we speak to God of His grace and righteousness, His holiness and love; He tells us in His Word of the same. We speak to Him of what Christ is—our beloved Savior. He tells us of His beloved Son. It is through His Word by the Spirit that we can enjoy such

communion. If it be broken or lost, the result is decay.

How often, alas! may our very feelings tell of this decay. We essay, as in days past, to pray; but, cold and lifeless, we utter words only; we do not pray. Compared with former unction, there is only helplessness. We take up the Word, but where is the quick discernment of the truth we once so sweetly enjoyed? the readiness of soul by which we had only to see or hear in order to receive? It was said by the blessed Lord, that "He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as the learned" (Isa. 50:4). He was thus of quick understanding, had an aptitude to know and receive that law of the Lord which was His delight. Truly such an understanding He had, so that He grew in wisdom and in all else that formed His holy and perfect life.

Are there not times when we too, in our measure, have had such an understanding- a mind quick to perceive, and capacity to retain, what we receive of the Word, and to follow the light which it gave? Failing this, and in times of spiritual declension, the spiritual understanding becomes dull, and the mind closed, as if it had come to pass that which is written, "From him shall be taken even that which he hath." Ah, then the state is darkness, when the wild beasts come forth, especially the roaring lion, who goes about seeking whom he may devour. On the other hand, when the soul is restored, He pours into us grace and all good. It will be thus with Israel. It was so with Peter when restored—the love, deep and unchanging, of the Lord filled his heart. David also, and so with us. When iniquity is gone the Lord will give in its place the quick understanding, and a conscience happy and at rest in His presence. But oh, meanwhile, what an anomaly—a child of God under decay! One who is an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ under decay!

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