

T H E

AMERICAN PREACHER;

O R, A

COLLECTION OF SERMONS

FROM SOME OF THE

MOST EMINENT PREACHERS,

NOW LIVING,

IN THE UNITED STATES,

O F

DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

VOLUME I.

ELIZABETH-TOWN, (NEW-JERSEY)

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M.DCC.XCI.

S E R M O N VII.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

B Y

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2 P E T E R iii. 18.

— *But grow in Grace.* —

NOTHING can be more worthy of our attention than the great truths of Religion.— There is no science so sublime in its object, so sure in its principles, or so important in its consequences. Nothing can be conceived more extensive for speculation, and at the same time more immediately influential upon our conduct. Theory and practice are here inseparably connected, and *the acknowledging of the truths* will always lead to *godliness*. A superficial acquaintance with some particular doctrines, and a bigotted attachment to favorite tenets may soon be obtained, and considered by many as an important acquisition. But the least reflection must convince us, that such have reason to conclude, *they are not taught of the Lord, and know nothing yet as they ought to know.*

There is in Religion a connection, a harmony, a chain so firmly united, that it cannot be understood, if taken only in detached parcels. Like a beautiful and useful machine, when deprived of any essential part, the whole is deformed or destroyed. In a coherent system of doctrine, there can be nothing useless, nothing repugnant, nothing which ought not to occupy the very place which the divine author, who composed the whole, has assigned it. What will become of Religion if we embrace any of its doctrines separately? What is the Religion of the Gospel, if the law can justify, or the Redeemer be not honored as the righteousness and strength of his people? What becomes of Religion, if faith be not productive of good works, or an hope is entertained of seeing God without the love and practice of holiness? How mutilated, how changed, how opposite to itself the whole can be made to appear, when only a part is brought forward to view! and how unsafe and wavering must that man remain, who rests satisfied with small attainments, and a partial knowledge of divine truths!

The Apostle Paul reproves the Hebrews for their little progress in knowledge, and urges them to go on unto perfection. There are some truths which may be considered as *principles of the doctrine of Christ*; so plainly revealed, so simple and evident, that mere babes in understanding can receive and digest them. But to be always contented with these, without aiming at farther pro-

gress, would be to feed upon milk, when an advanced age renders it proper to take stronger meat.

In the verse, of which our text is a part, the Apostle Peter also exhorts believers to grow in knowledge. *Grow, says he, in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* He comprises all religious knowledge, all that believers ought to be anxious to attain, as far as it relates to salvation, in knowing the Lord Jesus Christ; and with great propriety, for *in him the fulness of the godhead dwells bodily.* The eternal Son is one with the Father, and is very God. *All the riches of the full assurance of understanding, is found in the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.* In him also, as mediator, are *hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*; and to him as the glorious centre, all the lines of Religion are directed. *To know him, therefore, and to experience the power of his resurrection,* was the sum of Paul's desires, and ought to be the highest wish of every believer.—In this life, at best, we *see through a glass darkly.* The clearest manifestations of the Redeemer are but *the biding of his power*; and the most lively views of faith discover only a *part of his ways*, and prove how little a *portion* is known of him. How little do his people know of that depth of humiliation to which the Saviour stooped; of the greatness of his sufferings; and of the height of that glory to which their Emmanuel is now exalted!—How little have they discovered of the mystery of their

union with Christ; and of the value of his righteousness! How small is their acquaintance with the ways of the Lord in his sanctuary, and his dealings in providence! After the longest experience, after the greatest progress, there is still a *breadth and length, a depth and height*, which they have not comprehended; there remain riches in the love of Christ which pass their knowledge, and leave an unbounded field for farther investigation. Rest not therefore satisfied with what you have attained, *but grow*, says the Apostle, *in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.

But Peter premises as his first and principal exhortation, to *grow in grace*. This may be considered as comprising knowledge, and including still more. The last part of the verse can be viewed as explanatory of the first, while it directs in what way believers are chiefly to grow in grace, namely, by growing in the knowledge of Christ, as we shall directly see.

Without referring you to the context, which would lead us too far from our subject, let it suffice to observe, that the exhortation now before us, is immediately connected with the warning, the Apostle had just given, respecting the abuse of scripture; which was often *wrested, by the unlearned and unstable, to their own destruction*. This gave occasion for the last word of advice, and one of the most important Peter ever wrote, *but grow in grace*. As if the the Apostle had said, whatever others

may do with the scripture, however erroneous in their doctrines, or wicked in their lives they may prove; be you, believers, upon your guard. Beware lest ye be *led away with the error of the wicked*. Although you cannot totally and finally fall from grace, if ever ye have, indeed, been united to Christ, yet ye can *fall from your own steadfastness*; you may lose your comforts, and forfeit your usefulness; you may become involved in darkness, and bring a train of afflictions and chastisements upon yourselves. As an antidote against this, as the best preservative against backsliding, as the sum of all the christian duties, *grow in grace*. Whatever progress you may have made in Religion, you must still proceed. There is no fixed point at which a believer may stop. Each portion of life has its peculiar duties. To what degree soever you have brought your sanctification, unless you carry it farther, go on and persevere, you will act contrary to the spirit and letter of the Gospel. You may be nearer the end than others who have not made the same progress, but you have not yet obtained the prize. You may have performed the duties of youth, but those of manhood and old age remain to be discharged. You may have fulfilled the duties of prosperity, but those of adversity, of sickness, and of dying, are yet to be accomplished. To confine yourselves to a certain circle of duties, comforts and exercises; to stop at any determined period, to be satisfied, with what you have already attained of love, of faith, or holiness, is so contrary to the nature of

true Religion ; that whoever finds a reluctance for farther advancement, or feels lukewarm respecting a progress towards higher perfection, has reason to call in question his former attainments, and examine, narrowly, whether the spirit of Christ dwelleth in him.

Religion, like every other principle in the soul of man, is progressive. Wherever it is planted it will increase. This is one never failing mark of its truth and its divinity. It is not only the command of God, but it is the sincere desire of every regenerate soul to *grow in grace*. This is the subject to which your attention is this evening to be called. To assist you in forming right ideas respecting growth in grace, and excite you to attend thereto, is what, as the Lord shall enable me, I now propose. In doing this I must, first, explain the apostolic exhortations ; and then, secondly, direct you to the best means for complying with the same.

GROW IN GRACE, this is the exhortation of the apostle, this the solemn charge, expressive of a duty universally binding upon all believers, and extending to Christians of every description. None so young in the service of Christ as to be exempted ; and none so old or advanced in station, character or perfection, as to be raised above it. All have need of growth in grace, and the exhortation is addressed to all. To enable you to understand this, I must *first* shew you wherein growth in grace consists. And *then* what is implied in the exhortation.

To know wherein growth in grace consists, it is necessary previously to ascertain the idea that is here to be affixed to the word GRACE. This, in its usual and highest acceptation, means the love of God ; but it means his love considered in a particular view as it is exercised towards sinners, as it has for its object not only the miserable, the helpless and forlorn, but the rebellious, the vile, the unworthy, who have forfeited his favor, and deserve his wrath. Thus, *by grace ye are saved* : that is, not by merit, but by love freely extended to guilty and polluted creatures. And again, *the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men* : that is, the love of God, who so loved the world, as to give his only begotten son, is now by a preached gospel made manifest to Jews and Gentiles, and publicly offered to all, without distinction of nation, age, sex, or character.

But GRACE expresses also, in the language of scripture, the effects of this love, and comprehends all the benefits of the new covenant, as they are freely bestowed and savingly applied to the elect sinner. Thus justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ, is grace. *Being justified freely by his grace*. All that is wrought by the blessed influences of the holy spirit in the souls of his people, is grace. Effectual calling, a new heart, sanctification and perseverance ; in one word, whatever is necessary to render believers meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, is all grace. *Of his fulness have we all receiv-*

ed, and grace for grace. The foundation is laid in grace, and when the head stone is brought forth, the redeemed of the Lord will shout, in regard to the whole plan, *grace, grace.*

It is with respect to grace in this last view, we are to understand the apostle in the text, when he exhorts believers to GROW IN GRACE. The love of God, on his part, is not susceptible of increase. It is perfect and absolutely unchangeable. *He* loves with an everlasting love; and whom he loveth, he loveth to the end. But *we* may advance in experiencing the blessed effects of redeeming love. We may grow in the graces of the spirit, and become more universally holy. This is what the apostle means, and this is what I now must endeavor to explain.—Could I content myself in summing up the whole in few words, I might say—to grow in grace is to improve in holiness. It is to become more conformable to the image of the Son of God; more established in the truths of religion; and more genuine, habitual and uniform in all our acts of obedience. But this general view of the subject is not sufficient. To shew you in what it consists, I must descend to particulars. I observe, therefore:—

1. To grow in grace, is *to grow in habitual repentance*; to become more humble and contrite; *to know the plague of our own heart*; and loathe and abhor ourselves on that account more sincerely before God.—The leading exercises of the soul in

conversion, respected the malignant nature and exceeding greatness of our sins. The holy spirit first taught us from the word to know our misery, and mourn over our depraved natures ; and he continues, by his blessed operations, to lead us into clearer views of the spirituality of the divine law, and more accurate discoveries of our own vileness and unworthiness. Under such teachings, a greater hatred against sin must arise, a more constant sorrow for it, and ardent longings to be delivered from *the body of this death*. To grow in grace, is to grow in habitual repentance.

2. To grow in grace, is to grow in *faith*. *We are bound*, says the apostle, *to thank God always for you brethren, because that your faith groweth exceedingly*. By adverting to the nature of faith, and what is predicated in the word of God concerning it, you will be able to see, in what respects, the saints may grow in faith, and how essential a part this constitutes of the subject now before us.

Saving faith is not merely the simple act of the understanding, which receives a report, and assents to its truth upon credible evidence ; but it is a complex act, comprising also the consent of the will, and conformable exercises of the affections. It is not only a believing there is a Saviour, and even that we need his help ; but it is an actual acceptance of him as he is offered in the gospel ; a receiving him for ourselves in all his glorious offices, as the Lord our righteousness. But what now

are the effects of this faith? What does it produce? How does it work? We answer in few words:—By faith the soul becomes united to Christ. *He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.* The spirit of Christ is the bond of this union upon his part, and faith upon the part of believers.—Faith is that grace by which we are justified. *Being justified by faith.*—“Not that we are
 “acceptable to God upon account of the worthi-
 “ness of our faith, but because only the satisfac-
 “tion and righteousness of Christ is our righte-
 “ousness before God, and we cannot receive and
 “apply the same any other way than by faith on-
 “ly.”—Faith purifies the heart; and *without works it is dead.*—It magnifies the Lord Jesus: *Unto you who believe he is precious.* It introduces the soul to solid peace and rest. *We which have believed do enter into rest.*—Faith overcomes the world.—Faith leads to a patient waiting for the accomplishment of the promises. *He that believeth, shall not make haste.* It directs to the throne of grace, and enables the saints *to draw near with a true heart.*—It is a grace more precious than gold, and the believer must expect to have it tried. In a word, faith is the gift of God. It is the *substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* It is that by which the believer lives. He walks by faith; and it will abide until it has performed its whole work, and is at last changed into vision. *I live, said Paul, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.*

and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

From this general view, you may anticipate what is meant by growing in faith. It is to become more confirmed in the truth; and, from doubts and fears, to rise into a strong and filial confidence. It is to realize the union which is effected with Christ, and more habitually to derive all needed supplies from him, as our living and covenant head. We grow in faith, when it becomes more active, vigorous and productive of good works. When we are enabled in the spiritual warfare to take *the shield of faith, and therewith quench the fiery darts of the wicked.* And when in the darkest seasons and the severest trials, we learn to say, *though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*—Then we improve, when we are taught more cheerfully to submit to the yoke of Christ; to look unto Jesus; and to esteem it our highest honor and happiness to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow him. *Lord, said the disciples, increase our faith.* To grow in grace, is to grow in faith.

3. To grow in grace, is to improve in our love to God. To love God, *is to set him always before us, as seeing him who is invisible;* to meditate upon his glorious perfections; and feel a fervent outgoing of the heart towards him, as the first, the greatest, and the best of beings, the treasure, the portion

of the soul, our Father and our God. We grow in love when we increase in our desires to become holy as he is holy, and prefer his communion and fellowship above our chief joys. When having tasted that he is gracious, and experienced his love shed abroad upon our hearts, we are pained at his absence, and anxious to *draw near to him*, and have him *lift up the light of his countenance upon us*. Then we grow in love, when we feel it becoming *strong as death*, and engaging us to live for him, *whose we are and whom we serve*. When we can lose the creature, and yet find a satisfying portion in God. And when we can truly say, not only with respect to the earthly sanctuary, but to his courts in glory: *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God! because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live. I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be fed as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips. To grow in grace is to grow in love to God.*

4. To grow in grace is to advance in zeal for the glory of God. Innumerable motives press upon the mind to engage us to glorify him. *Whether we live we are the Lord's, and whether we die we are the Lord's, whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. We are witnesses for God; a people formed for himself, that we should shew forth his praise.* When we understand these motives better, when we feel their influence more,

and by these are urged to dedicate all we are and have to God, and improve our influence upon others around us to do the same, then we grow in zeal. We grow in zeal when we become more uniform in our obedience, more single in our views, and more fervently active in shewing forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. *The zeal of thine house, says the Psalmist, hath eaten me up ; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me. Horror hath taken hold upon me, because of the wicked that forsake thy law. Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end ! O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion !*

There is indeed frequently in young converts, a zeal without knowledge ; a boldness of spirit, unrestrained by prudence, and untaught by experience. Like Jehu, they are ready to say—*come with me and see my zeal for the Lord.* The principle, in part, is right, although it is mixed with unhallowed passions, and tainted with pride. But a more extensive acquaintance with the deceitfulness of their own hearts, and maturer attention to the nature and difficulties of the Christian life, is found soon to humble their forward spirits, and lead them into the paths of sober and genuine zeal—*It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing ;* and the Lord Jesus gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. It is proper to serve God, not with a luke-warm

soul, which *offers the lame and the sick*, but with our whole heart, with raised affections, and with fervency of spirit. To grow in grace is to grow in zeal.

5. To grow in grace is to become more *heavenly minded*. The Redeemer has brought life and immortality to light, and opened prospects to our view, which could only be obtained by a divine revelation. He has raised his people, especially under the New Testament dispensation, to exalted privileges, and made *us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*. To comprehend these privileges more clearly; to relish them higher; and have our conversation more and more as citizens of Heaven, is to grow in heavenly mindedness.— When the temper and views of strangers and pilgrims prevail in us, and we find our affections more placed upon things above; when the work of Heaven is more pleasant and habitual, our worship spiritual, and our praises affectionate, then we become more heavenly minded. To meditate upon *the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of Angels, and the general assembly of the church, and first-born which are written in Heaven*; to feel an habitual desire of joining with them:—

As with a Seraph's voice to sing!

To fly as on a Cherub's wing!

Performing with unwearied hands,

The present Saviour's high commands!

to be weaned from this world; willing to stay, and yet desirous to depart and be with Christ; this

is to become more heavenly minded, and this is to grow in grace.

6. Finally, to grow in grace, is to be *emptied of all dependance upon ourselves, and practically to constitute the blessed Jesus our all and in all.* He must increase, but we must decrease. We take him for our all when *first we believe*; but what that fully implies, we do not, when first we believe, yet understand. To grow in grace is the unfolding of that mystery. It is experimentally to know that Christ is of God made unto us, *sanctification*. That in the Lord we have not only righteousness, but in him also we have *strength*. It is to experience that when we are weak, then we are strong, and when we grow downward in humility, patience and resignation, then we most effectually grow upwards in holiness. — In this last particular, perhaps more than in any other, the saints are enabled to discern their growth in grace. They become in their own eyes, more vile, more empty and helpless, while the grace of Christ proves sufficient for them, and his *strength is made perfect in their weakness*.

Time would fail me to enumerate all the fruits of the spirit, or descend to all the branches of duty in which a growth in grace is exemplified. Let it suffice to close this part of the subject, by saying in one word, which sums up the whole, that as far as our wills become conformable to the will of God, so far and no farther we grow in grace.—To

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this we are exhorted in the text. This distinguishes the real Christian from the hypocrite, the living saint from the dead formalist. To this the principle implanted in regeneration will prompt us; and this the Redeemer expressly declares to be characteristic of his disciples. *Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit. I am the vine, ye are the branches, he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing. Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples.*

Having seen what is meant by GROWING IN GRACE, permit me now, in a few short observations, to shew you what is *implied* in this exhortation. And,

1. It is evident, to grow in grace, implies that a soul has *received* grace. The tree must be planted before it can grow. The Lord is to be sought and served *after the due order*. The exhortation indeed extends to all who read the word. It is the duty of all men to grow in grace. But the unconverted must obtain grace, they must first receive the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, before they can follow him; the principle of holiness must be formed in the heart by regeneration, before it can possibly grow.

2. Growing in grace, implies an *actual increase*. It is not a mere nominal, but a real; not a fictitious, but a true and substantial advancement in holiness. Who ever has grown in grace, is become wiser and

better than he was before. It is opposed to a stupid satisfaction with past attainments, and especially, to all backsliding. It has its own peculiar marks and evidences, by which it may be distinguished from all counterfeits, and is essentially different from the highest accomplishments which the natural man can possibly possess.

By study and attention, an extensive view not only of science in general, but of religion, may be obtained. The doctrines can be known, their connections observed, and the arguments by which they are supported, properly brought forward. Reason and revelation supply materials for vast erudition, and this, when joined to great gifts, may recommend a man to the world ; but after all, that man may fail of the grace of God, and his knowledge only serve to puff him up. *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have not charity, I am nothing. Thou believest there is one God, thou doest well, the devils also believe and tremble. A mere growth in knowledge or gifts, is not a growth in grace.*

Education, connections and prejudice, may create a violent attachment to some particular doctrines and forms of worship ; and in this it is easy to go great lengths ; it is very easy to cry, *the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord*, without pos-

possessing the least degree of holiness or love to the Lord of the Temple—To grow in *bigotry* is not to grow in grace.

From a weakness of understanding, from passions liable to be quickly moved, and from unsettled principles, the human mind is susceptible of strange impressions, and is often wrought up to most extravagant heights; but a growth in *enthusiasm* is no growth in grace.

Our holy Religion is a most reasonable service. Its principles will bear the severest scrutiny, and believers can give a reason of the hope that is in them. Nothing therefore that is dishonorable to God, unworthy of man, or that is not founded upon scripture, must be considered as genuine. *To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*

3. The exhortation to grow in grace implies, that *holiness is progressive*; that religion, when it first begins in the heart, is not so extensive; not, if I may use the expression, so complete in all its parts, so distinguished in all its features, as it afterwards becomes. It is the usual way of God, in all his works, to rise from smaller beginnings to perfection; and we know it is so in religion. By progressive steps his people are led, and they become gradually more and more prepared to glorify him on earth, and enjoy him in heaven. Hence, believers are compared to babes, to children, to

young men and to fathers. The very words imply very different degrees of knowledge, strength, usefulness and perfection.

4. This exhortation implies a *positive duty* incumbent upon all believers, to desire and strive to grow in grace. It is their duty, because it is the express command of God—because it is promised to all his people—and because it has always been the wish of the saints, their *principal* prayer and constant practice. The passages in scripture which refer to each of these are so numerous, that to mention them would be almost to repeat the bible. As a proof respecting the practice of the saints, let me only remind you of the apostle Paul. ‘Do you know,’ (to use the words of a very celebrated preacher*) ‘do you know a greater than Paul? Can you conceive virtue in a more eminent degree? Behold a man fired with zeal, making what he thought the cause of God his own cause, God’s enemies his enemies, the interest of God the interest of himself! Behold a man who turns his attention to truth, and, the moment he discovers it, embraces and openly avows it! Behold a man, who not content to be an ordinary Christian, and to save himself alone, aspiring at the glory of carrying through the whole world for public advantage, that light which had illuminated himself!—Behold a man, preaching, writing!—What am I saying? Behold a man, suffering, dying, and sealing with his blood the truths he taught! An ar-

* Saurin Serm. 1. Cor. ix. 26, 27.

dent zealot, a sincere convert, an accomplished minister, a bleeding martyr!—Shew me in the modern or primitive Church, a greater character than Paul! Let any man produce a Christian who had more reason to be satisfied with himself, and who had more right to pretend that he had discharged all his duties! Yet this very man, this Paul, *forgot those things which were behind!* This very Paul was *pressing forward!* This is the man who feared he should be *a cast away!* And you *smoking flax*, you *bruised reed*, you who have hardly taken root in the Christian soil, you who have hardly a spark of love to God, do you think your piety sufficient? Are you the man to leave off endeavoring to make new advances?"

5. To add no more, this exhortation implies, that as it is our duty to attend to this one thing, so we may be assured that God has provided proper *means* for our obtaining the same. Sanctification, considered on the part of God, and as wrought by him in our souls, is one of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and inseparably follows after justification. But he deals with us as rational beings, and therefore, sanctification considered on our part, becomes an essential duty; and we must see to it, that we are faithful and diligent in the use of those means which God has appointed, and which are wisely calculated to produce a growth in grace. But what are those means? In what way, and by what method can this great end be best attained?

The reply to these enquiries was the SECOND thing I promised, and which I now intended to make:—But the subject is too important to be slightly passed over, and to do justice to it, will require more time than is allotted to our present exercise. I shall therefore reserve this, with an application to the whole, as the substance of another discourse. And shall now close, with only requesting you seriously to reflect upon the duty to which we have been exhorted.—GROW IN GRACE! How great, how solemn a charge! Like a voice from Heaven, it addresses us with authority divine, and love inexpressible! A voice, similar to that which called to the apostle in the Apocalypse, *come up hither!*

Adore, my brethen, the God of grace, and bless his holy name for providing a ransom!—*What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.* A new and living way is consecrated for us, and we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. How sure the atoning efficacy of his death! How rich the justifying merit of his righteousness! For his sake the holy spirit will dwell with men, and powerfully apply what the Redeemer purchased. He renews their souls, bestows his graces, and by a progressive sanctification, prepares them *as a bride adorned for her husband.*

But is this the great work which God has wrought? Is this the work which he has been carrying on in the hearts of his people in every age? And are there thousands now upon earth, who are united to Christ, and, by growing in grace, are preparing to dwell forever with him? Let it alarm your minds, and excite in you most earnest and fervent desires to participate in the same blessing: O that you may obtain grace to surmount every obstacle, and resolve to join the company of the redeemed! O that you may say, and perform what you say, *we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you!*

This world is the first stage of our existence.— Here we are preparing for future scenes, where our state will be unalterably fixed, in happiness or wo. Now is the accepted time for us, *behold now is the day of salvation.* Dream not of any probation hereafter. From hell there is no reprieve. The wicked will go away with the irrevocable curse of the Supreme Judge, and remain sealed down into an everlasting, an absolutely everlasting punishment. There scripture leaves them; *and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever.* While life then remains, and the means of grace are enjoyed, harden not your hearts and wrong not your own souls. The Son of God has come to you in a preached gospel; see that you reverence him.— *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little:—Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.* Amen.

S E R M O N V I I I .

G R O W T H I N G R A C E .

B Y

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2 P E T E R i i i . 18.

— *But grow in Grace.* —

THE service in the Temple, under the Old Testament, was fitted to the dispensation of the Church before the coming of the Messiah. The types and sacrifices directed the views of believers to the Lamb of God, who was to take away the sins of the world; and when their faith was in exercise, they attended the offerings with raised affections, and surrounded the altar with songs of praise. At their three great stated feasts, they repaired to Jerusalem with great willingness, and cheerfully surmounted the difficulties and discouragements which attended them on the way. The Psalmist celebrates this in the 84th Psalm, and pronounces a blessing upon those, *in whose hearts are the ways of them.* Who having fixed their happiness in God as their highest end, rejoice

in all the ways which lead to him, and are faithful in using the means he has appointed to strengthen their graces, and keep up their communion with him. *They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.* As they travelled towards the temple, their company increased by the accession of more from the towns through which they passed; and with respect to individuals, instead of wearying with the fatigues of the journey, they found their strength recruited, the nearer they came to Jerusalem.—What is said of the Israelites in that Psalm, is fully accomplished, in the highest sense of the words in all believers, under the New Testament dispensation. *They go from strength to strength.* They grow in grace, and shall at last become perfect in glory. The righteous shall hold on their way, and they that have clean hands shall be *stronger and stronger*.—They are changed from one degree of glorious grace to another, until at length *every one of them appeareth before God in Zion.* Blessed therefore is the man *in whose heart are the ways of them.* Who loves, and earnestly improves the means of grace, because of their connection with the end, and has no care, delight or pleasure so near his heart.—What those means of grace are, we now, my brethren, are particularly to consider.

In a former discourse upon growth in grace, I proposed—

I. To explain the exhortation of the Apostle.
And,

II. To direct you to the best means for complying with it.

The *first* I have finished.—It now remains to attend to the *second*. What are the MEANS appointed of God? In what way, and by what method can we best attain a growth in grace?—I shall first premise a *general* answer, and then descend to *particulars*.

FIRST, I answer in *general*, that we cannot expect to grow in grace without *vigorous exertions*. The progress of Christians is always mentioned in scripture, by terms which imply the most active and resolute efforts. It is called a warfare, a wrestling, a race; and the exercises of believers are described as such, which call up all their attention, and require their utmost exertions. They are to give *all diligence*, to be *strong*, to quit themselves *like men*, to *watch* and to be *sober*; they are to *strive to enter in*, and in a certain sense, are to use violence, *for the violent take it by force*. The obstacles which render such efforts necessary, are not on the part of Religion, in itself considered, *for the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*; but they arise from the remaining depravity in our own hearts; that *law in our members*, which wars against the law of our minds, and too often brings us *into captivity to the law of sin*. We are not therefore to suppose when we are justified by believing in Christ, our whole work is done. Then first we put on *the armour*, and must *fight the good fight of*

faith before we can obtain the crown. If we sleep, the enemy will soon sow tares; our corrupt natures, before we are aware of the danger, will prevail against us, and sins and lusts which for the time appear dead, will arise and put on new strength. It is *the hand of the diligent that maketh rich*, as well in Religion, as in the common affairs of life. To grow in grace we must be *active*, we must be *vigilant*. Again, I answer in general, that to grow in grace, the believer must always remember his total dependance for direction and assistance in every duty, upon the Lord Jesus. *Work out*, says the Apostle, *your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure*. Exertions on our part are altogether compatible with the operation of God in and upon us. So far from proving an objection against salvation through grace; this very union of duty and promise, of our efforts and the divine aid, is a strong argument of its truth, and recommends it as worthy of all acceptance. These very exertions prove that of ourselves we are insufficient, and that our *life is hid with Christ in God*. We are not called to this warfare in our own strength, or sent out upon our own charge. *My son*, says Paul to Timothy, *be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*.—Without remembering this, the Christian will find himself, however well furnished in other respects, like David when girded in the armour of Saul; incumbered with weight, but unfit for the combat. *I cannot go with these,*

said the stripling hero to the monarch ; and I cannot go with these, will be the reply of every believer, whom experience has taught ; but *I will go in the strength of the Lord God : I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.*

But let me specify particulars, and enumerate some of the principal means, which are most efficacious, with the divine blessing, to promote our growth in grace :

The *first* I shall name and recommend to you is, a frequent meditation upon the once crucified but now exalted Saviour. This I name first, not only because it is a leading motive, but because our Apostle has mentioned it in this very verse before us, as most intimately connected with growth in grace.

In the life of the blessed Jesus, we have the brightest display of the beauty of holiness. The law of the Lord was within his heart. Zeal for his Father's glory like a fire consumed him. *He went about doing good.* What an example ! What love to God ! What love to man ! How holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners ! How amiable religion appears in him ; and how indelible the impressions which a believing meditation upon the life of Christ must make upon the soul ! When Moses returned from conversing with Jehovah in the mount, his face shone ; and frequent converse with the holy Saviour will make believers shine, and shed a lustre upon all their conduct. Beholding his life will change them into the same

image, and compel the world to acknowledge *that they have been with Jesus.*

But in the death of Christ, an equal if not a superior motive, is found to engage us to fervent holiness. The malignant nature of sin appears in contrasting it with the law of God ; but it is never seen in all its odious and accursed colors so clearly as when viewed in a crucified Saviour. God *spared not* his only Son, but delivered him up to all the demands of divine justice, when he made *his soul an offering for sin.*—Who can remember the agonies of Gethsemane, the horrors, pains, and conflicts of the cross, and not find an abhorrence of sin excited in his soul ? Who, when meditating on the sufferings of the Redeemer, can refrain from exclaiming ; shall I cherish those lusts which murdered my Saviour !—shall I dishonor God with my iniquities, and renew that guilt which nothing less than the precious blood of his Son could expiate ! By the cross of Christ *the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world !*

The whole character of the mediator, his glorious person, his important offices, the gracious errand upon which he came, the wonderful methods by which he finished his work, and the faithfulness and compassion which he now exercises while seated on his throne, are all calculated, when viewed in faith, and frequently meditated upon, to constrain us henceforth not to live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us, and rose again. By this we shall grow in grace.

But *another* mean, and one absolutely necessary for growing in grace is, the *word of God* ; the frequent reading of it in secret, the hearing of it explained in public, and attending faithfully upon the ordinances.—In the holy scriptures the soundest principles of morality are taught, striking examples are exhibited, and the most animating sanctions of rewards and punishments are produced. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness.* It is through the truth that God sanctifies his people. His *word is truth*. But to profit by the word, it is necessary to attend to its genuine meaning ; to view it not only in detached passages, but in its connection, and thus endeavor to understand the design and scope of the holy spirit. There are, however, some important texts, which are more immediately calculated to direct, to warn and to encourage the soul in the practice of holiness. These ought to be fully digested, laid up in the memory, and by frequent meditation rendered familiar. The Emperor Antonius, gave this lesson to himself ;—“ As
 “ surgeons always carry their instruments with
 “ them, to be ready for any sudden emergency ;
 “ so let what you have learned be prompt, and
 “ ready at hand, to direct you in whatever relates
 “ to things divine or human.*” And Seneca relates this sentiment of Demetrius the Cynic :—“ It is
 “ better to retain a few precepts of wisdom, and

* Lib. iii. sec. 13.

“ have them familiar, and ready for immediate
 “ use, than to learn many things, and after all,
 “ not be able to produce them when they are
 “ needed.*” If heathen philosophers could give
 such lessons respecting their systems of morality, and
 if they found so much benefit by this method, how
 much more must it be our duty and advantage to
 draw water from the pure fountain, and have al-
 ways some texts of scripture ready and applicable
 to every duty, temptation or trial. This David
 experienced ; *how sweet are thy words unto my taste !
 yea sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through thy
 precepts I get understanding ; therefore I hate every
 false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a
 light unto my path.* This the apostle recommends—
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wis-
dom. And this our Lord has taught by his exam-
 ple, when he answered the tempter—*it is writ-*
ten.—

The ordinances of the sanctuary are also pecu-
 liarly calculated to promote growth in grace. It
 is by *the foolishness of preaching*, that God enlarges
 the kingdom of his Son ; by this he subdues sin-
 ners to his obedience, and by this he reclaims
 backsliders, builds up his people, and prepares
 them for glory. The word and sacraments are the
 green pastures into which he leads his flock ;—
 there he meets with them, and makes them *to rest*
at noon. All therefore who desire to grow in grace,
 must be diligent in reading the scriptures, and es-

* De beneficiis lib. vii. cap. i.

teem it their duty and privilege to attend the ordinances ; for these are the established means appointed of God, and there he bestows the blessing. A *third* particular I mention as necessary to promote a growth in grace, is a practical acknowledgment of the necessity of the constant *influences of the holy spirit*. He dwells in his people as in his temples ; he is given to them as the spirit of adoption, to work in them the temper and confidence of children. He is the comforter to lead them into the truth, and shine upon his own work in their souls. But he is especially the sanctifier, the creator of the new heart, and the promoter of holiness in all his saints. Live then under an habitual sense of your dependance upon his blessed operations. *Quench not the spirit. Grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption.* But plead daily with the Psalmist—*Cast me not from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me. O send out thy light and thy truth, and let them lead me !*

In connection with this, it is proper next to name *prayer*, as an efficacious mean for growing in grace. Whatever may be said of the prayer of nature, it is certain from scripture and experience, that grace teaches a sinner to pray from proper principles, and in a right manner. The holy spirit helps the infirmities of his people in this important duty. They are made to love prayer.—They delight in the exercise, because it introduces them to the *fellowship of the Father and his son Jesus*

Christ ; and because it is an established rule in the dealings of God with his children, that *the Lord will be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do for them whatever he has promised.* Be much then in this duty. *Faint not ; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*

What I shall mention as a *fifth* mean for obtaining growth in grace is, *self examination.* A partiality for ourselves, and the deceitfulness of our hearts, will prompt us to draw favorable conclusions, and determine we are something, when perhaps we are nothing. What can be better calculated to prevent pride, and teach us our true character, than a frequent and accurate examination of ourselves? By this we may learn whether we grow or not ; whether we increase in the knowledge of God our saviour, love him more, and serve him better, than we formerly did. Heathen moralists have been exemplary in this duty. It was an observation of Seneca, “ that every day
 “ the soul should be called to render an account to
 “ itself. Sextius,” says he, “ did this. At the
 “ close of every day, before he retired to rest, he
 “ interrogated his soul—which of your lusts have
 “ you conquered this day? What vice have you
 “ resisted? In what respect are you better than
 “ you were? Can there,” says the moralist, “ be a-
 “ ny thing more excellent than thus to conclude
 “ the day? How peaceable, how exalted, how free
 “ one feels, when his soul is either commended or

“ admonished, and, as a watchman and secret censor, is conscious of its own conduct.”*—Shall men under the influence of natural religion speak and act thus? And will not Christians, who are taught by a divine revelation, and seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, under the sure guidance of the Captain of their salvation, be equally attentive to their conduct? Shall heathen be watchmen and censors, and will not believers examine themselves? Go, my brethren, and do likewise; do more than they did, and daily search into your *principles* as well as conduct, if ever you expect to grow in grace.

I might add many other excellent and approved duties which are immediately connected with growth in grace; but I have already mentioned as much as your attention and patience will bear.—I shall therefore only add, by barely naming them, a frequent renewal of your covenant with God in Christ;—a chearful bearing of reproof;—and an attentive observation of the providence of God.

These, all these in their proper time and order, are the means best calculated to promote growth in grace. And *if these things be in you and abound, they make you, that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. If ye do these things ye shall never fail; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

* Seneca, lib. iii. de Ira, cap. 36.

My brethren, you have seen wherein growth in grace consists, and what it implies : you have also seen the means appointed of God, and the necessity of improving these means for obtaining that invaluable blessing. The whole is practical, and many have doubtless applied the truths to their own souls as I proceeded. Something, however, must be added, to direct to the improvement which all ought to make of this important subject. From what you have heard then, learn,

First, that true religion is a real and inestimable acquisition. It is not a fiction :—It is not bigotry, superstition, or a devised fable :—It is not the mark of a mean, but of a great mind ;—It is wisdom in the understanding, and rectitude in the will and affections. The man who is truly religious, is born again. He is brought out of darkness into marvellous light. The principle of holiness is implanted in his soul, and, like the returning prodigal, he comes home to his father. How great a change ! What an unspeakable blessing ! It is worthy of God to give, and ought to be the highest object of our desires to receive. Without this, it is impossible *to enter into the kingdom of God*, or experience the exercises and consolations of his people.—Religion is profitable with respect to *the life that now is*, as well as of *that which is to come*. It prompts to a zealous discharge of every duty ; and, in a moral view, it renders a person greatly superior to what he was before his conversion.—Religion forms a better parent or child ; a better

magistrate or subject ; a better master or servant ; and a better friend and member of society, than, without it, can possibly be formed. It suppresses the baser passions, suggests the noblest views, and animates the soul to *be rich in good works*. No principles ever known among men, are so efficacious in promoting holiness, and none actually abound in good works so much as those, who feel the constraining influence of the doctrines of grace.

Let the enemies of revelation, let the scoffers, therefore, learn to think and speak with reverence of what bears the stamp of divinity, and is so essential even to the good of society. They are enemies to mankind as well as to God, who ridicule sacred things, and oppose the progress of the gospel. You, who are of this class, may glory in your growing numbers, and by your sophistry and impudence expect to drive religion from the field ; but know, that it is supported from on high ; it has triumphed over much more formidable antagonists, and will live and grow against all the opposition of the gates of hell. And with respect to yourselves, be assured, that however much you may be esteemed on other accounts, yet as infidels and scoffers, you are pitied and despised by the wise and good. And know also of a certainty, that if you persevere and die in the same mind you now are, you will be forever shut out from the presence of that God whom you never loved, and from those blessings which you never relished, nor

fought. But should convictions of sin and guilt ever arise in your heart, you will then find that the religion of nature is not sufficient for your salvation. It may teach you something of your misery, but it is from the gospel, that very gospel which you now affect to despise, you can alone learn what you *must do to be saved*.

As to you who profess the religion of Christ, and receive the Bible as the standard of your faith and practice, what conclusion do you draw from the subject you have heard? Will mere orthodoxy in doctrines; will regularity in your conduct, or punctuality in worship, render you truly religious? Will these produce pardon for your sins, or make you meet for glory? Alas! in all these you may abound, and yet have no love to God, or sincere submission to the Lord Jesus. To constitute vital piety, and make you a real disciple of the Redeemer, you must obtain a new heart, and by faith become united to Christ,

Shall I alarm your fears by appealing to the terrors of the law? Shall I arraign your consciences at the dread tribunal of your Judge? Shall I remind you that you have to do with the *living God*, who is, out of Christ, *a consuming fire*? Shall I repeat, that without holiness no man can *see God*? I will rather at present plead with you, and, as a humble suppliant, beseech you to be reconciled to God. What will it avail to have a name to live, if yet you are dead? To toil through duties, and

profess religion, without feeling its power, or sharing in its comforts? What will you be profited, if you gain the whole world, and lose your own souls? Will riches, fame or wisdom, will pleasure, or any other acquisition, ultimately benefit you, if God is not your father, if Jesus is not your saviour, and you have not the spirit of Christ? This is the one thing needful—Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all necessary blessings will be added unto you. O that you may hear the voice of love, which invites the *weary and heavy laden* to come; which repeats the call to all who *will*, and declares that he who cometh, *shall in no wise be cast out*. Come in all your guilt and unworthiness, and rest not until you have obtained repentance and faith, from the exalted Saviour. Both are his gift, and you lie at his mercy. This is your first step; this you must experience before you can grow in grace.

Are there any present who are blessing themselves with the remembrance of some former convictions, and rest in these as sufficient and complete? Our present subject brings a message to such. If you are contented with your past experiences, if you can sit down satisfied because you have joined with others in worship, when perhaps there was a revival of religion, if you are not troubled with your own wicked heart, and have no desire for improving in holiness, you have reason to be alarmed. The text administers no immediate comfort to you. Instead of telling you

to grow in grace, I must in faithfulness declare to you, that there is reason to fear you have never had grace. Your work has not been in truth.—You have rested short of Christ.—You are yet in your sins.—O perish not at the threshold! Let not the character of an almost Christian satisfy you; but look unto Jesus.—Attend to the first works speedily, that Christ may give you life.

But *secondly*, we have seen that wherever grace is implanted in the soul it becomes an active principle, it grows, it is a fountain of living water springing up into everlasting life. Let all then, who have obtained the unspeakable happiness and honor of believing in Christ, adopt the language and sentiment of Paul. *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* Have you received Christ Jesus as your Lord and Redeemer, then walk in him. Put on the whole armour of God, and learn to fight the good fight of faith. Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. Lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset you, and *run with patience the race that is set before you.* Look unto Jesus, and so run that ye may obtain. So run, *not as uncertainly, so fight, not as one that beateth the air,*

Strive to preserve the clearest evidences of your justification, and conscientiously improve your talents, *for to him that hath shall be given.* Remember, that to glorify God by a humble and holy walk; to promote the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom; to do good to others, and fulfil all the duties of your respective stations, are the worthy objects which grace inspires. In performing these you shine as lights in the world, you glorify your heavenly Father, and most effectually work out your own salvation. To these you are called, and these as you grow in grace, will become more and more habitual, pleasant and easy. Be not satisfied, O believer! with your past attainments; the half has not been told you of the comforts of religion, of communion with God, and of the manifestations of Christ to the souls of his people. Be not contented with your former exertions in the service of your Lord; the half has not been done of what you ought to do, or what through grace you can perform. Look at some of your brethren who have felt the constraining power of his love, and see what they have done, and suffered for their blessed master. What zeal! What self-denial! What animated worship! What fervent love! What laborious efforts to promote the glory of God, and bear a testimony against the prevailing sins of their day and generation, have characterized many in the church of Christ!—Go believer! go, and endeavour to imitate them. As long as life and breath remain, let all be devoted to the

service of your exalted Saviour. And while gratitude unites with faith and love, you will never judge you have done too much for him, who died for you.—In choice and in affections you have left all for Jesus, and have openly associated with the people of God: you delight in their company and are not ashamed of Christ.—Perhaps some of us present have dedicated our whole lives to his immediate service in the gospel, and given up all the flattering prospects of wealth and preferment in the world for his sake. But we have none of us suffered persecution, or yet *resisted unto blood*. We have none of us endured what many of his dear children have frequently sustained. “As for us,” says Justin Martyr, speaking of the Christians of his day, “As for us that have entertained the religion of the holy Jesus, yourselves know very well, that there is nothing throughout the world that is able to subdue or affright us out of our profession, Nothing is more evident than though our heads be exposed to swords and axes, our bodies fastened to the cross; though thrown to wild beasts, and harassed out with chains, fire, and all other instruments of torment, yet do we not depart from our profession. Nay the more these things happen to us, the faster do others flock over to the name of Jesus, and become pious and devout followers of Christ.” “Amongst us,” says Cyprian, “there flourishes strength of hope, firmness of faith, a mind erect amidst the ruins of a tottering age, an immovable virtue, a patience serene and chearful,

and a soul always secure and certain of its God." Instead of producing particular instances in which these declarations were abundantly verified; let me only repeat the noble answer which the celebrated old Polycarp made before the tribunal of the Proconsul. "These fourscore and six years have I served Christ, and he never did me any harm, and how then can I blaspheme my master and my Saviour!"—In this manner Christians formerly spoke and acted; and while the same Saviour, the same relation and grace remain, an obligation continues for the same sentiments, and a similar boldness and zeal.

Are any of you, while I am speaking, conscious of having proved false to your vows, and stand chargeable with backsliding instead of growing in grace? Alas, my brethren! you have robbed your souls of many comforts; you have brought reproach upon the holy religion you profess, and it is an unspeakable mercy if you have been kept back from *presumptuous sins*, and not given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. But hear with gratitude and astonishment, ye backsliders! The exhortation to grow in grace is addressed also to you. The unchangeable Jesus is waiting to restore you. He is Jehovah Rophi, the Lord that healeth thee. And his language to you this day is, *return ye backsliding children and I will heal your backslidings*. O let it be the language of your souls, we come unto thee compassionate Saviour! *We come unto thee for thou art the Lord our God! To re-*

turn is your first step towards growth in grace. *Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen and repent, and do the first works.* To yourselves take all the shame and guilt, and let none presume to make God the author of their sin. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.* God forbid! *You have not so learned Christ.* You are convinced that every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed, and then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin. Be deeply humbled, and confess your sins to him, who has declared that he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Though a sense of guilt may prompt you to say, *I am cast out of thy sight,* yet look, my brethren, look again to his holy temple. Look in faith to Jesus, and you will find, *he is the propitiation for our sins.* May the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit, offered himself without spot to God, *purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God!*

But there are many of the children of God, whose souls are cast down from a failure of those vigorous exercises which they once had; and who, notwithstanding they cannot charge themselves with any positive backslidings, are yet often crying out, *O that it was with me as in days past! Will the Lord cast off for ever, will he be favorable no more! Ye tossed as with a tempest, remember that this is your infirmity!* The exercises of his people are not always of the same kind. Believers pass through various seasons. They are not forever on the

mount rejoicing in the Lord, but often descend into the valley of affliction and trouble. *They sink sometimes in deep mire where there is no standing; and find themselves in a situation which may be compared to a horrible pit, and miry clay.* Be not therefore, my brethren, disheartened. These are the footsteps of the flock. *Who then is among you that feareth the Lord; that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*

But darkness and want of former comforts is not the only case must here be attended to. A humbling sense of indwelling sin, of small progress in holiness and continued barrenness often discourage the saints. They see others, who perhaps began in the service of Christ, much later than themselves, advancing far beyond them in knowledge, zeal and love. Upon the strictest examination they appear to themselves, not only defective in growth, but even worse than they were at first. To these, and to similar complaints we answer, the Lord is sovereign in his dispensations. But after all, the judgment you form of yourselves may probably not be just. Is not the depravity which you discover in your own heart; is not a view of your deficiency in love and zeal, over which you mourn, a proof of more light and of enlarged experience? Do not these tend to humble you and render the blessed Jesus, in all his offices, more precious? And is not this a growth in grace? Forget not, O be-

liever ! that you must decrease and Christ must increase ; and be persuaded, that by these very methods, of which you complain, he is emptying you of pride and remaining confidence in your own righteousness, and thus making room for his becoming all and in all to your souls. It is thus *he leads the blind by a way they know not, and in paths that they have not known.* Fear not. Let faith and patience have their perfect work ; and continue to wait upon the Lord and you shall renew your strength.

Let those who are young disciples become animated with the exalted prospects which the service of the Redeemer opens to their view. Be assured that faithfulness to God will bring its present reward, besides the glory which remains in reversion. Remember your relation is now changed, and you are no longer your own. You counted the cost when you gave yourselves away to Christ, and you are not to look back. Serve the Lord, then, with full purpose of heart. Flee youthful lusts, and assort with *them, that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.* In every trial, in all your temptations look unto Jesus. Be not discouraged, he is faithful, he will establish you and keep you from evil. *Little children,* says the Apostle John, *I write unto you because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.* And surely they, to whom much is forgiven, will love much. Indulge this love and prove it, young Christians, by keeping all his commandments. Grow in grace.

And now, believers, while we excite you all to grow in grace, you cannot fail, in proportion as you understand the exhortation, to mourn before God that this is so little attended to, in our day. Cherish this generous sorrow, and let it deeply affect your hearts, that such faint traces of holiness are discernable in the visible church : that so many deceive themselves and dishonor Christ, by professing his religion, while their lives and conduct announce them to be baptized infidels. But let it most affect you, that many, even of the children of Zion, appear to have departed from that strictness in piety and conscientious holiness, which always ought to characterize real believers. Alas, *how is the gold changed, and the fine gold become dim !*

Let all, who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, often unite in prayer for a revival of religion, and plead fervently for the outpouring of his spirit. We have been witnesses to the wonderful interpositions of Providence in the progress and issue of the late war, and the national blessings in which we are now established. *The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.* We now wait for his salvation to Zion ; for a day of power in his churches, when he shall bear witness to his own truths, and numerous converts submit to the Redeemer. Pray much for this. Your fervent intercessions will be a happy token, that the *time to favor Zion, yea the set time is come.* Pray for ministers and people, that they may seek the glory of God and not their own honor ; and that all may

unite by holiness and growth in grace, to recommend the religion of Jesus.—But whatever cloud may be still impending over Zion, and whatever may be the consequences of the spirit of dissipation, error and infidelity which has gone forth ; be ye, believers, faithful, and your souls *will be given you for a prey*. God will preserve and strengthen you, and *he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*.

You are under indispensable obligations to forsake all sin and glorify God, not only as his creatures, but especially as his children who are created anew in Christ Jesus. Often meditate upon these obligations, and remember that *ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price, and therefore whatever others may do, ye are to glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's*.

Strive to obtain clear apprehensions of growth in grace, that you may determine with precision, wherein it consists. Despise not the day of small things. It is by little and little the enemy shall be driven out before you. Through many fallings and risings, changes and vicissitudes, your progress lies. By many sad experiences you will know that your lusts are not yet all destroyed ; but by many comforting evidences you will assuredly find the promised aid of the spirit, and the power of Christ in promoting your growth in grace.—Be afraid of sin and of temptations, but be not afraid of the cross. Trials and afflictions

prove no impediment to sanctification. When sufferings produce proper exercises, they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness; they make us sensible of our weakness; they imbitter sin, and lessen that attachment to the world which mars our progress and hinders our growth in grace. Be then of a good courage and go in the strength of the Lord. Your salvation is *nearer than when you believed*, and you may, in humble hope, look forward to your everlasting home, which is full in view: for yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. And now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

