

OF INCREASE OF GRACE, AND PERSEVERANCE THEREIN TO THE
END.

PROV. iv. 18.—*But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

HITHERTO we have spoken of the benefits flowing from or accompanying the sense of justification. I come now to speak of those that accompany or flow from the being of it, namely, increase of grace, and perseverance. In the text there is an elegant comparison of two things like to one another. Wherein we have,

1. The subjects of comparison, *the path of the just*, and *the shining light*.

(1.) The subject compared, *the path of the just*. The just, in the language of the Old Testament, are those who are justified by faith, Hab. ii. 4. 'The just shall live by his faith.' They are a travelling company going towards Canaan; they have a path or way wherein they go, and they make progress in it. The word here used signifies, (1.) The progress itself, or course in the way, as Job vi. 18. 'The paths of the way are turned aside.' Isa. xxvi. 8. 'In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee.' (2.) The place or way through which one goes. The thing meant is the gracious and holy life of the just.

(2.) The subject it is compared to, *the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*. It is compared to light, both because it is comfortable to themselves, and instructing, exciting to others, and honourable. It is not like the light of a meteor, that shines a while, and then disappears quickly, nor that of a candle, which burns and burns down till it wastes itself; but like the light of the sun, and not the evening-sun, that declineth, but the morning-sun, that with increasing brightness and heat advances to the meridian.

2. The points of the comparison. (1.) As that light is a growing light shining more and more; so is the grace of God in a soul, going from one degree to another. (2.) As it does not go out, but grows on to the perfect day; so grace never dies out, but goes on till it be perfected in glory.

DOCT. 'Increase of grace, and perseverance, are benefits flowing from or accompanying justification.'

I. Of Increase or growth of Grace.

Here I shall shew,

1. That real grace doth increase or grow.
2. How a Christian grows in grace.

3. The causes of this growth.
4. The difference betwixt true and false growth.
5. Whether true grace grows always.
6. Apply.

FIRST, I am to shew that real grace doth increase or grow. This is evident from three things.

1. Scripture-testimony. Grace is a holy seed that springs and grows, Mark iv. 27: however little at first, like a grain of mustard seed, Matth. xiii. 31, 32; like leaven, ver. 33. God has promised it, Psal. xcii. 12. Mal. iv. 2. 'But unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall.'

2. God has appointed a certain stature that his children shall grow to, Eph. iv. 13. This is the perfection of grace. Hence the Christian is first a little child, then a young man, then a father, 1 John ii. 13. They walk, they run, they fly, they mount like eagles, Isa. xl. ult.

3. This is the end of divine influences, Isa. xxvii. 3. and xlv. 3,
4. It is also the effect of divine ordinances, Eph. iv. 11, 12. It is the end of all the pains of the heavenly Husbandman on the plants of his vineyard.

SECONDLY, I shall shew how a Christian grows in grace. He grows four ways.

1. Inward, into Christ, as the branch doth into the stock, Eph. iv. 15. Cleaving to him, and knitting with him more firmly, his faith grows stronger, 2 Thess. i. 9; his love more vigorous, his hope firmer, his dependence closer, &c. This is the spring of all other Christian increase in grace.

2. Outward, in good works, in all the parts of a holy life, piety towards God, and righteousness towards men, Gen. xlix. 22. The growing Christian advances in the work of his salvation, Phil. ii. 12; in the work of his regeneration, Acts xiii. 36. He goes on in the fruits of a holy life, for God's honour, his own good, and for the good and advantage of his fellow Christians, knowing that he is not born for himself.

3. Upward, in a heavenly disposition, Phil. iii. 20. The end of his journey that he is aiming at is the upper world; and as he is coming out of this world, in action so is he coming out of it in affection, Cant. viii. 5. He grows more heavenly in his desires, joys, delights, griefs, sorrows, &c.

4. *Lastly*, Downward in humility, self-denial, self-loathing, resignation to the will of the Lord, &c. The more religion prevails, there are always more of these graces, Job xlii. 5, 6. Psal. xxii. 6.

2 Cor. xii. 11. For the more grace there is, there is the more knowledge of God and of one's self; which are two boundless depths, the one of glory, the other of sin.

THIRDLY, I shall shew the causes of this growth.

1. Union with Christ. John xv. 4. 'As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me.' He that is not united to Christ can never grow in grace, more than a branch that does not knit with the stock. But where the Lord takes hold of the soul by his Spirit, and the soul takes hold of Christ by faith, there is an union whereby they become members of Christ, and their growth is secured.

2. Communion with Christ, John vi. 57. 'He that eateth me, even he shall live by me.' He is the fountain of the saints life, who gives it them, and more abundantly. He is he head of influences, by which they are made to increase in grace, as the sap from the root and stock makes the branches to grow. And this communion they have with him.

(1.) In ordinances, public, private, and secret, so that they are made to grow by the fatness of his house, Psal. xcii. 13. 'Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God.' The word edifies them, Isa. lv. 10, 11. The sacraments strengthen and confirm them, as they did the eunuch, who went on his way rejoicing, Acts viii. 39. Prayer and other holy exercises profit them, to their spiritual increase. But all by the influences of his Spirit in them, Isa. xlv. 3, 4.

(2.) In providences. Mercies are blessed to them for this end, Isa. lxvi. 11, 12. crosses, John xv. 2. 'Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' And often have the people of God grown most under the weight of afflictions. But this also is by communion with Christ in them, Phil. i. 19. I know that this shall turn to my salvation—through the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.'

FOURTHLY, I proceed to shew the difference betwixt true and false growth. As hypocrites may have seeming grace, though not real, so that seeming grace may grow, Mat. xiii. 5. There is a two-fold difference.

1. True Christian growth is universal, Eph. iv. 15. False growth is only in some particular things. The true Christian grows in all the parts of spiritual life proportionably; for all the graces of the Spirit are linked together, so that when one grows, they all grow. Such a difference there is betwixt them as betwixt a well thriving child and a rickety one. The former grows proportionably in all the parts, the body, legs, arms, &c. The other grows too, but grows

not so ; the head grows big, but the body grows not. So the hypocrite may get more knowledge, but no more tenderness, holiness, &c. He is not outwardly, but inwardly cold, as to the life of religion.

2. The hypocrite soon comes to a stand, the Christian goes on to perfection, Luke viii. 14. Phil. iii. 13, 14. They have their measure ; and when they have come to that, they stand like the door on the hinges ; but the true Christian is going on, labouring to be holy as God is holy, 1 John iii. 3. ‘Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.’

FIFTHLY, I am to shew, whether true grace grows always.

1. It does not always grow, nor at every particular season. It has its winters and decays, as well as its spring and growing times, Rev. ii. 4. ‘I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.’ Yet,

2. It never decays utterly, 1 John iii. 9. ‘Whosoever is born of God, his seed remaineth in him.’ The flame of it may go out, but there is always a live-coal left, though under the ashes, which the influences of the Spirit will blow up again. It will not always be winter, Hos. xiv. 7. ‘They that dwell under his shadow shall return, they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine.’

3. A Christian may be growing, and yet not be sensible of it. If one judge of his case by present feeling, he may be mistaken, Mark iv. 27. If one fix his eyes on the sun, or a tree, he cannot perceive the one moving, or the other growing. But compare the tree with what it was some years ago, the place where the sun now is, with where it was in the morning ; so shall ye know the remarkable difference. And the very same difference may be observed in the growth of a Christian.

Again, the growth is not to be measured only by the top, but by the root too. If a tree be taking with the ground, and spreading its roots there, it is surely growing. And though Christians may want the consolations and flashes of affections they sometimes had ; yet if they be growing in tenderness, humility, self-denial, &c. it is true Christian growth.

Inf. 1. This may cause fear and trembling to,

1. Apostates, who instead of growing are gone back to their former courses of profaneness and impiety. Fallen stars were never stars but in appearance, and fearful will be their doom, Heb. x. 38. ‘If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.’

3. Those who are at a stand in the way of religion. They have come up to a form of godliness, and they are like the door on the hinges. They are not striving to be forward in mortification.

3. Those who are growing worse instead of growing better. They

are like dead trees ; summer and winter is alike to them ; they are never the better for all the warnings from the Lord's word or providence : but whatever God says by providences or ordinances, they go on their own way, adding one sinful step to another.

Inf. 2. Improve ordinances for spiritual growth. O ! it is sad to be sitting under means of grace, but never growing. This is the ready way to provoke the Lord to remove ordinances.

Inf. 3. Let the least spark of true grace be nourished, for it will grow, Isa. xlii. 3.

Inf. 4. *Lastly*, Labour to be growing Christians.

II. OF PERSEVERANCE IN GRACE.

‘Perseverance in grace is another benefit flowing from, or accompanying justification.’

Here I shall shew,

1. What this perseverance is.
2. How it is to be understood.
3. That the saints shall persevere to the end.
4. What are those things which make hypocrites fall away, but over the belly of which saints persevere.
5. The grounds of the perseverance of the saints.
6. The means of perseverance.
7. *Lastly*, Apply.

FIRST, I shall shew what this perseverance is. To persevere is, to continue and abide in a state into which one is brought. And this perseverance is a firm and constant continuance in the state of grace, even to the end of one's life, Matth. x. 22. Col. i. 23. It is opposed to total apostasy, and utter falling away from grace. It is continuing and holding on, joined to a good beginning.

SECONDLY, I am to shew how this perseverance is to be understood.

1. It is not to be understood of all who profess Christ. Hypocrites may be seeming saints, and may have seeming grace, which may blaze for a while, and afterwards be quite extinguished, totally and finally lost, John vi. 66. There are temporary believers, who continue for a while, but having no root, do wither quite away, Matth. xiii. 21. Mere out side Christians, and Christians in the letter, may so apostatise, as to lose all, and never recover.

2. It is to be understood of all real saints, those who are endowed with saving grace. Those who, by virtue of regeneration, may call God their Father, as well as the church their mother, shall abide in

his family, and never fall out of it, John viii. 35. Though the counterfeit of grace may be utterly lost, yet real grace cannot. We own,

(1.) Saints may lose the evidence of grace, so that they cannot discern it in themselves. Thus it may suffer an eclipse, Isa. l. 10. Sometimes a child of God not only believes, loves, &c. but knows he does so: but at other times it may be out of his sight, so as he may apprehend he has none. The jewel may fall by, though it cannot fall away; and the spiritual husband may lock up himself in his chamber from his spouse, though he never quite leaves the house.

(2.) Saints may lose the exercise of grace, Cant. v. 9. Though the holy fire be not quite put out, yet it may cease to flame for a while; though they have spiritual armour lying by them, they may be so benumbed with the prevailing of corruption, that they cannot wield it. Wise virgins may slumber and sleep as well as the foolish.

(3.) They may lose much of the measure of grace they have had. True grace, though it cannot die out, yet is subject to languishing and decays in the strength thereof, Rev. iii. 2. They may lose much of their love to God and one another, Rev. ii. 4. much of their former tenderness, as David's heart smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment, but afterwards was guilty of murder and adultery; much of their liveliness in duties, Rev. iii. 2. and so of other graces. But,

(2.) Saints can never lose grace finally, so as never to recover it, 1 Pet. i. 5. John vi. 39. No doubt a child of God may stray away from the Lord as well as another? but though a servant may go, and never return to the house, yet a son will be sought out and brought back again, Psal. cxix. ult. John xiii. 35. 'And the servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the son abideth ever.' So however far the saints may go wrong, the Lord will recover them.

(2.) Saints never lose grace totally neither; they never lose it altogether, though for ever so short a while, 1 John iii. 9. Their lamp may burn dim, but it is never quite put out; they may fall back, fall very low, so as themselves and others may have little hope of their recovery, but they never fall off, never fall away, Psal. xxxvii. 24. 'Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.'

Both these hold true of relative grace; that is, there is no falling out of the state of justification, adoption, union with Christ, peace with God, the love of God, &c. and of inherent grace, faith, love, the fear of God, &c.

THIRDLY, I proceed to shew that the saints shall persevere to the end. This is evident from,

1. The Lord's own promises. He has said it, and will he not do it? John x. 28, 29. Psalm cxxv. 1. 'They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.' It is true they have many enemies that watch to do them mischief, but the Lord has promised to guard them, Isa. xxvii. 3. 'I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.' They may fall into sin, and provoke the Lord to anger against them; but he has promised, that though he lay his hand on them, he will not lift his love off them, Psal. lxxxix. 31,—34. Though they may be forsaken, yet it shall neither be total nor final, Isa. liv. 7,—10.

2. From the saints' confidence of perseverance and eternal life. How confident was Asaph, Psal. lxxiii. 24. 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory?' If the saints could fall away from grace, how could they 'rejoice in hope of the glory of God?' Rom. v. 2. How could Paul triumph over 'death, life, angels, principalities, powers; things present and to come, height, depth,' &c? Rom. viii. 38, 39. Confidence in their own management, is not the way of the godly. Prov. xxviii. 26. 'He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.'

3. *Lastly*, According to the scripture, perseverance is a discriminating mark betwixt the elect and non-elected, Matt. xxiv. 24. as also betwixt real saints and hypocrites, Luke viii. 13, 14, 15. 1 John ii. 19. From whence we may gather, that the utter apostasy of the elect saints is impossible in respect of the decree of God; that those who get true grace, keep it to the end, while others lose theirs; and that they who utterly apostatise, never were true saints.

FOURTHLY, I shall shew what are those things which make hypocrites fall away, but over the belly of which saints persevere. In the general, there are three things.

1. Satan's temptations, 1 Pet. v. 8. He is a subtle, powerful and malicious enemy, a liar and murderer from the beginning. Whatever hopeful signs are found about any, he sets himself to rob them of them, for their ruin. He seeks to set the hypocrite and the sincere through the wind, and prevails to blow away the one, but not the other. By a miracle of grace, the saints are preserved amidst his fiery darts, Luke xxii. 32.

2. The world's snares. While professors are in the world, there are snares to catch them, and carry them off the way. (1.) The world's prosperity is a great snare, and makes many apostates, Prov. i. 32. and xxx. 9. But true grace will hold out against it, Cant. viii. 7. (2.) Its adversity. Tribulation and persecution offends the temporary believer, and makes a scattering among Christ's

summer-friends, Matth. xiii. 20, 21. But the true Christian will weather out the storm, Job xvii. 9. 'The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger.' Poverty strips many of their religion, but not a true saint, Rev. xiv. 4. (3.) The example of the world; the torrent of an ungodly generation strips many of their form of godliness, Matth. xxiv. 12. 'Because iniquity shall abound the love of many shall wax cold.' But the saints shall not be carried away with the stream, Psal. xii. 7. 'Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.

3. *Lastly*, The corruptions and lusts of the heart. These betray the hypocrite into apostasy, Jer. iv. 3. Compare Luke viii. 14. Lusts lulled asleep for a while, but not mortified, rise up and make shipwreck of many souls. But true grace is never quite expelled by the flesh's lustings against it; but by the power of God is preserved, like a spark of fire in the midst of an ocean.

FIFTHLY, I proceed to shew the grounds of the perseverance of the saints.

1. The unchangeable decree of God's election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of the Father to them. Electing love is free love, and also unchangeable, Jer. xxxi. 3. 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.' And God's purpose of grace and salvation cannot be disappointed, 2 Tim. ii. 29. 'The purpose of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.'

2. The merit and intercession of Christ the Son. He redeemed them by paying a full price, which must be lost, if they be lost, 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. And 'he ever liveth to make intercession for them,' Heb. vii. 25.

3. The perpetual abiding of the Spirit in and with them, John xiv. 16. which secures their union with Christ, and the preservation of the seed of grace, 1 John iii. 9.

4. *Lastly*, The nature of the covenant of grace, which is furnished with such pillars as the first covenant had not, namely, the promises of perpetual conservation in the state of grace, Jer. xxxii. 40. 'I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good: but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.'

SIXTHLY, I shall shew the means of perseverance. Let none think that they may live carelessly, having once got grace, because it cannot be lost: for besides, that one's giving himself quite up to such an opinion and course is inconsistent with saving grace, God has joined together the ends and means, and none shall separate

them, Acts xxvii. 22. 'And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.'—Compare ver. 31. 'Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.' Now, in the general, these are,

1. God's ordinances and providences. He makes use of both to keep the feet of his saints, John xv. 2.

2. The duties of religion, and exercise of the graces, faith, fear, watchfulness, &c. 1 Cor. x. 12. 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.'

I shall conclude with a few inferences.

Inf. 1. Would ye have a treasure which ye cannot lose? then get grace. Ye may lose your worldly treasures, comforts, and enjoyments; the world's good things may go.—But grace is durable.

2. Take heed to yourselves and beware of apostasy; for it is not the beginning well, but holding on to the end, that will secure your salvation, Matth. x. 22. 'He that endureth to the end shall be saved.' Beware lest Satan, the world, and your lusts, beguile you, and ye lose all ye have wrought, 2 John 8.

3. As ever ye would persevere, look well to the foundation of your religion; for sincerity will last, but hypocrisy is a disease in the vitals that will end in death. The builders endeavour to lay the foundation fast and securely, and then they are sure the superstructure they raise upon it shall stand firm. Therefore lay the foundation well, and ye may be assured that the building shall weather all storms.

4. *Lastly*, Let those whose care it is to be found in Christ, and to live to him in all the duties of piety and righteousness, be comforted amidst all their temptations, snares, and corruptions, in that God who has begun the good work, and will perfect it, Phil. i. 6.