

WHAT KIND OF PERFECTION IS ATTAINABLE IN THIS LIFE?

Let, therefore, as many as be perfect be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.—PHIL. III. 15.

THESE words are inferred out of the foregoing context, as the illative particle *therefore* showeth.

In the words are two things:—

1. His exhortation to the strong and grown Christian: *Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.*

2. His condescension to the weak: *And if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.*

In the former branch we have:—

1. The term by which the strong Christian is expressed: 'As many as be perfect.' He had said before of himself that he was not yet perfect, ver. 12. Yet now he supposeth it both of himself and others: 'Let us therefore, as many as be perfect.' Therefore perfection must be taken in a limited sense, to avoid the seeming contradiction.

2. The advice or counsel given, 'Be thus minded;' what is that? *τοῦτο φρονεῖτε*, 'Think the same thing with me.' What that is must be known by the foregoing context, and may be gathered from the third verse. He had spoken of some false teachers and Judaizing brethren, who gave out themselves to be patrons and defenders of the circumcision, and other ceremonies of the law, as if these things did commend them to God. Now the apostle reproveth them, and saith they were not *περιτομή*, 'the circumcision,' but *κατατομή*, 'the concision,' destroyers and renders of the church, not the true people of God, who were sometimes noted by the term *circumcision*. They are the *concision*, the cutters and dividers of the church; but we are *περιτομή*, the true *circumcision*, 'who serve God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh;' that is, who have no confidence in any superficial righteousness, but seek our justification before God, and the renovation of our natures from Christ alone; and serve God by exercising this grace in faith, love, and hope; or who seek to Christ alone for his renewing and reconciling grace, that we may serve God in a spiritual manner, and so at length attain

the promised glory. Now this he proveth by his own instance, who had as much cause to glory in the flesh as any of them, but suffered the loss of all things, and counted all things wherein they gloried, and he might have gloried, but loss and dung, that he might obtain this grace from Christ Jesus, and at length, after a diligent, self-denying course of service and obedience, be brought home to God. Now, saith he, 'As many as be perfect, *τοῦτο φρονεῖτε*, mind this,' take care of this, and do you, with the loss of all things, press to this.

3. His condescension to the weak, who were not satisfied with the abrogation of the ceremonies of the law, though they had embraced other parts and points of Christianity: 'And if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this to you.' Here—

[1.] Something is supposed, that they should not be cut off from the rest of Christians, either by the harsh censures or rigorous dealing of the strong, or the pertinacious obstinacy of the weak. The perfect, that have the truth of their side, must not condemn others; nor the weak must not condemn and censure them.

[2.] Something expressed, or the reason of this mutual condescension and forbearance. If they be sincere and humble, God will at length show them the truth.

I begin with his counsel to the strong and grown Christian; and there I shall speak, first, of the term by which they are expressed: 'Let as many of us *as be perfect*.'

Doct. That there is a kind of perfection attainable in this life.

I shall, first, explain the point by several distinctions.

Secondly, prove that all Christians should endeavour to be perfect.

For the first, there is a double perfection: *perfectio termini et præmii*, and *perfectio viæ seu cognitionis et sanctitatis*—a perfection of the reward, and a perfection of grace.

1. Of the reward which the saints shall have in heaven, where they are freed from all sinful weakness: 1 Cor. xiii. 10, 'When that which is perfect shall come, then that which is in part shall be done away.' In heaven there is perfect felicity and exact holiness; then the saints are glorious saints indeed, when they have neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor blemish, nor any such thing, Eph. v. 27; when 'presented faultless before the presence of his glory,' Jude 24. Now this we have not in the world; but because this we expect in the other world, we are to labour after the highest perfection in holiness here, because allowed imperfection is a disesteem of blessedness. Do we count immaculate purity and perfection in holiness to be our blessedness hereafter? and shall we shun it, and fly from it, or at least neglect it, as if it were our burden now? No surely! 'He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, as Christ is pure,' 1 John iii. 3. He that looketh not for a Turkish paradise, but a sinless estate, will endeavour it now, get as much as he can of it now. When you cease to grow in holiness you cease to go on any farther to salvation; you seem to be out of love with heaven and blessedness when your desires and endeavours are slaked.

2. The perfection of grace and holiness is such as the saints may attain unto in this life: Col. iv. 12, 'That ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.' So we are perfect when we want none of those things which are necessary to salvation, when we study to

avoid all known sin, and address ourselves to the practice of all known duty, serving God universally and entirely.

Secondly, There is perfection legal and evangelical. Legal is un-sinful obedience; evangelical is sincere obedience: the one is where there is no sin; the other no guile, no allowed guile. The one standeth in an exact conformity to God's law, the other in a sincere endeavour to fulfil it; the one will endure the balance, the other can only endure the touchstone.

1. The legal perfection is described Gal. iii. 10, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all the words of this law to do them.' A personal, perpetual perfect obedience. It supposeth a man innocent; it requireth that he should continue so; for the least offence, according to that covenant, layeth us open to a curse; as the angels, for one sin, once committed, were turned out of heaven, and Adam out of paradise. The omitting of aught we are to perform, the committing aught we are forbidden, yea, the least warping, as well as swerving, by an obliquity of heart and spirit, maketh us guilty before God. Now this is become impossible through the weakness of our flesh. Rom. viii. 3. Man is fallen already, and hath mixed principles in him, and cannot be thus exact with God.

2. Evangelical: when the heart is faithful with God, fixedly bent and set to please him in all things: 2 Kings xx. 3, 'Remember, Lord, I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart.' This may be pleaded in subordination to Christ's righteousness; this perfection is consistent with weakness: 2 Chron. xv. 17, 'Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was perfect all his days;' and yet he is taxed with several infirmities. This perfection all must have: 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 'And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind.' What is done for God, as it must be done willingly, readily, not by constraint, but the native inclination of the soul; so perfectly, that is, with all exactness possible. As some may do many things which are good, but their hearts are not perfect with God: 2 Chron. xxv. 2, 'He did that which is right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart.' Not a sincere bent of soul towards God alone. When the heart is divided between God and other things, Hosea x. 2, 'Their heart is divided;' James i. 8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' A heart against a heart; in point of faith, between God and other confidences; in point of love, between God and the vanities of the world; and God's interest is not chief, nor do we love him above all things; in point of obedience, between pleasing God and pleasing men, and pleasing God and our own vain fancies and appetites, honouring God and promoting our worldly ends; you set up a rival and partner with God. Now this perfection we must have, or else not in a state of salvation.

Thirdly, There is a perfection absolute and comparative.

1. That is, absolutely perfect to which nothing is wanting. This is in our Lord Christ, who had the Spirit without measure; this is in our rule, but not in them that follow the rule: Ps. xviii. 30, 'As for God, his way is perfect.' But that absolute perfection is not in any of the saints here upon earth, I prove by these arguments:—

[1.] Where there are many relics of flesh or carnal nature left, there a man cannot be absolutely perfect ; but so it is with all the godly, there is a double-warring working principle in them : Gal. v. 17, ' For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other ; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.' And it is actually confirmed in Paul, witness his groans, Rom. vii. 24, ' Oh wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?' Mark there, the apostle speaketh of himself, not of another ; of himself, in his present renewed estate, not of his past and unconverted estate, when a pharisee. His past estate he had spoken of, ver. 9, ' Sin revived, and I died ;' but, ver. 14, ' I am carnal ;' and ver. 15, ' That which I do, I allow not ;' and ver. 18, ' How to perform that which is good, I find not.' Many things there said cannot agree to a carnal man. As, for instance, not allowing sin, ver. 15 ; hating sin, in the same verse : ' What I hate, that do I ;' so delight in the law of God, ver. 22. Again, there is a double man distinguished, ver. 17, ' It is no more I, but sin that dwelleth in me.' Again, he distinguisheth between him and his flesh, ver. 18 ; so between an outward and inward man, ver. 22, 23. Lastly, He giveth thanks for deliverance by Christ, all which are competent only to the regenerate. Now, these things being so, surely God's best servants are not absolutely perfect.

[2.] There are none but sometimes sin : 1 Kings viii. 46, ' For there is no man that sinneth not ;' and Eccles. vii. 20, ' There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not ;' and James iii. 2, ' In many things we offend all ;' 1 John i. 8, ' If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' Therefore, no man so perfect as to be without all sin.

[3.] There is none but need the mercy of God, and ought to pray for this mercy for the pardon of their daily sins, Mat. vi. 13, as we pray for daily bread. This petition our Lord directeth us to put up, not for the sins of others, but our own. Now these arguments prove that no man hath a righteousness that is perfect, without defects. The best of God's children have innumerable frailties, which may humble them, and which should be seriously laid to heart, and watched over, every step of our way to heaven.

2. There is a comparative perfection, and that is twofold :—

[1.] When those who live under the law of Christianity are compared with other institutions.

[2.] When the professors of Christianity are compared among themselves.

[1.] When the professors of Christianity are compared with those that live under other institutions. They that submit to Christ's terms are said to be perfect, because Christianity itself is a perfection. For instance, take that one place (and the rather, that I may wrest it out of the hands of the Papists, who distinguish between evangelical precepts of necessary duty, and counsels of perfection, to establish monkery and voluntary poverty, as a more perfect state of life than that which the common sort of Christians live). Their most colourable place is Mat. xix. 21, ' Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in

heaven, and come and follow me.' Is not this a counsel of perfection? Doth not Christ call it so? Or is every one bound to give all his goods to the poor, and turn monks or anchorites? No; the meaning of the word, *If thou wilt be perfect*, is no more but this, if thou wilt ascend to that higher pitch and rule of living, to which I come to raise men, if thou wilt be a Christian. The perfection here spoken of is Christianity itself, not a heroic eminent degree of it; and the condition here required is matter of command, not counsel; only such as if we will not submit to, we are not Christians; for a man that would have the privileges of the gospel, he must submit to the duties of the gospel, or the conditions required by Christ, that is to be a perfect, thorough Christian. You will say, Must we sell all and give to the poor, in contemplation of the heavenly reward?

Ans. 1. Every man is bound to bestow goods, land, and life as God shall direct, and part with all the wealth in the world whensoever it is required of him. Now, it may be required of us directly or by consequence. Directly, by an expressed command, such as this young man had from Christ; and actually to sell our estates, and give to the poor, obligeth none, unless we have such a like command from Christ himself as this young rich man had. By consequence, when we cannot obey any particular precept of Christ without danger of being undone by it. And so it obligeth all Christ's disciples to part with all, rather than to break with Christ; for no man is a Christian unless he selleth all for the pearl of price, Mat. xiii. 46. And our Lord telleth us, that he that loveth anything more than him, is not worthy of him, Mat. x. 37; that is, is no Christian; so that if it be impossible to preserve our fidelity and obedience without parting with our wealth, we must impartially perform it, though it be with loss of estate and life itself; and if we do not resolve and undertake to do so, we are no Christians, and cannot be saved. In baptism, we vow to forsake the world and follow Christ, when the world cometh in competition with him. If, in a time of trial, we do not perform it, we forfeit the privileges of Christianity, and all title to blessedness. Therefore this perfection is necessary for all Christians. You esteem, prefer, choose Christ above all, resolving, whatever it cost you, to be faithful to him; it is not a high and arbitrary point in Christianity, but a necessary duty. You will say, What can the strongest Christian do more than sell all, than part with all? — *Answer*, They can do it with far greater love, readiness, and joy, than the weak Christian can do. The difference between Christians is not in the thing done, but the manner of doing. Well, then, this is to be perfect, thus must you all be perfect; for this perfection is necessarily constitutive of sincerity; you are not true Christians without it.

[2.] When compared with others of the same profession, believers are distinguished into perfect and imperfect. Though none can attain to absolute perfection of holiness, yet there are several degrees of grace, and diversities of growth among Christians, and the strong are said to be perfect in comparison of those weak ones who are raw in knowledge, or feeble and impotent in the resistance of sin. Thus the perfect are opposed to the babes in Christ; as, when he had spoken of our 'growing into a perfect man in Christ Jesus,' he presently addeth,

'That henceforth we be no more children,' Eph. iv. 13, 14. And elsewhere, when he had spoken of the 'perfect,' 1 Cor. ii. 6, who are skilful in spiritual things, he presently opposeth to them the 'babes in Christ,' chap. iii. 1. The same you may observe in Heb. v. 13, 14, 'He that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age,' *τελείοι*, 'perfect,' as in the margin. See also 1 Cor. xiv. 20, 'Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men,' 'perfect, or ripe of age.' These, and many other places, show the notion of *perfect*: it is not absolutely taken, but comparatively. Those who well and thoroughly understand Christian doctrine, and are habituated to a course of godliness, and have a confirmed faith and love to God, and this in opposition to novices and inexperienced Christians newly entered into Christ's school. Now thus we must be perfect, not always children. It is a monstrous thing, after many years' growth to be a babe still, and an infant still. This sense is of chief regard here.

3. There is a perfection of parts, and a perfection of degrees; that is growth.

[1.] Perfection of parts is when we have all things that belong to a sincere Christian, or to a state of salvation; as living creatures are perfect as soon as they are brought forth, for they have all things belonging to that creature; it is not maimed or defective in any part: thus an infant is perfect the first day of his birth, as well as a man of riper age. Thus a Christian must have the perfection of integrity, all the parts which belong to a new creature; grace to enlighten the mind, bend and incline the heart to God, govern the affections, rule the appetite; one grace added to another, that the Christian may be entire and perfect, and in no point lacking, James i. 4. What is defective in parts cannot be supplied by any after-growth. A Christian cannot be perfect in degrees unless he be perfect in parts; leave out one necessary grace and the new creature is maimed; some leave out temperance, others patience, others love, 1 Peter ii. 5, 6, 7.

[2.] There is a perfection of degrees, that is, when a thing is absolute and complete, and to which nothing is wanting, and hath attained its *ακμή* and highest pitch. So we are only perfect in heaven, Heb. xii. 23, 'The spirits of just men made perfect;' those spirits who are unclothed and divested of the body; in their mortal life only they were upright,¹ but in their heavenly life perfect. Here they walked with God, and endeavoured an universal obedience to him, and so made capable; but now live with God, and are admitted into a nearer communion with him than we mortals are; they are freed from all sin and temptation, they are beyond growth: corn doth not grow in the garner, but in the field. Well, then, though we be not perfect in degrees, yet we must all be perfect as to parts, we must entirely resign ourselves to God's use, without allowing any part or corner of our hearts to be possessed by any other.

4. Perfection is to be considered with respect—(1.) to our growth, or (2.) our consummation; here it is only *in fieri*, there *in facto esse*. Things are said to be done when they are begun to be done, 2

¹ That is, 'they were only upright.'—Ed.

Cor. v. 17. And so they are said to be perfect who are in the way of perfection; he that is in his growing estate, increasing more unto grace and righteousness; 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image;' 2 Cor. iv. 16, 'Though the outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' They do seriously set upon the work. Thus perfection is taken:—

[1.] As to means. The ministry was appointed 'for the perfecting of the saints,' Eph. iv. 12. That they may be more enlightened and more sanctified; more brought to the knowledge of God and obedience of his will. There are means appointed by God for the perfecting of grace, as well as the first working of it in us: 1 Thes. iii. 10, 'That I may perfect what is lacking to your faith.'

[2.] As to the improvement of means: 2 Cor. vii. 1, 'Perfecting holiness in the fear of God,' making progress in the way of grace towards perfection, when the habit is more increased: 2 Peter i. 8, 'For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ.' And Christian practice is more uniform: 1 Thes. iv. 1, 'That as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and please God, so that ye would abound more and more.' It is not enough to have grace, but we must grow in grace; progress is always necessary, though exact perfection be not attained, so that then the heart is perfect with God, when you make it not a slight purpose only, but your constant endeavour to come up to your pattern and rule, continually striving against sin, and aiming at a higher degree of holiness.

(2.) Consummate. When after all the hazards of the present life, when at length we shall be presented to Christ, and by Christ to God. Presented to Christ: Col. i. 28, 'That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus;' that is, fully complete, according to that holiness required and exemplified by Christ. And by Christ to God: Col. i. 22, 'To present you holy, and unblamable, and irreprovable in his sight.'

I now come to the reasons.

Secondly, The reasons why we must be perfect, that is, not only sincere, having all parts of a Christian, but endeavour after the highest perfection, and for the present, want nothing conducive nor necessary to salvation.

1. We have a perfect God: Mat. v. 43, 'Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' God's perfection is our copy, and that is exact, and we are required to imitate him; and, therefore, we must not set bounds to our holiness, and say, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further;' when we are come never so far, yet this is not like God. The force of this rule is not taken off, because it is limited to one perfection in the divine nature in the Evangelist Luke, for he readeth, instead of being perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, 'Be ye merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful,' Luke vi. 36—that is a special way of Christian perfection; but God's children must aim at the perfection of all virtues, not only love to enemies. As mercy is one of the divine perfections which we ought to imitate, so is holiness, veracity, and wisdom, 1 Peter i. 15, 16. Surely this direction was given in the gospel to some purpose or not: if not, then Christ spoke words in vain; if to some purpose, we are obliged to perfection; though we cannot fully ob-

tain it in this life, we must still aim at more, and come more near to it. And having God for our pattern, we should always set him before our eyes, as he is represented to us in his word, and his Son Jesus Christ, the express image of his person, to be imitated by us.

2. We have a perfect rule: Ps. xix. 7, 'The law of God is perfect;' and 2 Tim. iii. 17, 'The word of God is able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work.' The strictness of the law as a rule is adopted into the covenant of grace, into the very frame and constitution of it, and so far bindeth as to allow no weaknesses and imperfections, but that we must still bewail failings, and strive after the utmost conformity to it in all things. As we have a perfect pattern, so we have a law still, that is the perfect rule of all righteousness, and therefore we should endeavour to conform to it more and more.

3. We have a perfect Redeemer: Col. ii. 10, 'Ye are complete in him.' We have all things from him, and in him, necessary to salvation. In ourselves we are empty, destitute of everything which might commend us to God, but there is a fulness in Christ to be communicated to all who, being sensible of their own emptiness, do seriously apply themselves to him; a perfect wisdom, a perfect righteousness, perfect sanctification, and supplies for our perfect glory and blessedness. He beginneth by his Spirit to renew our natures, and this grace is still of the growing hand, till all be crowned in glory; there is a complete fulness in our Mediator.

4. There is a perfect reward, or a perfect state of glory, in which there is nothing wanting, either to holiness or happiness. The scripture describeth it by our growing up into a perfect man in Christ Jesus, Eph. iv. 13. We have our infancy at our first conversion, when liable to childish ignorance and many infirmities; we have our youth and growing age, when making progress in the way of grace towards perfection; and lastly, we have our perfect manly age when we are come to our full pitch, when grace is fully perfected in glory. In scripture there is nothing said of the fading and declining time of old age. Oh! blessed will that time be, when we shall be holy and undefiled, above the reach of temptations; when believers receive all immediately from the fountain of holiness, and are filled with the fulness of all perfections. And shall we that have such hopes be lazy and negligent? No; we must press towards the mark, if we expect it as our felicity, we must prize it, and seek after it, and get more of it every day.

Use 1. Is to press and exhort you to labour after Christian perfection.

1. Motives. What you lost in Adam must be recovered in Christ, or else you dishonour your Redeemer. Now we lost in Adam innocency and perfect holiness, therefore you must seek to recover it by Christ, for certainly Christ is more able to save than Adam to destroy, Rom. v. 17. The abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness came by Jesus Christ. It is true, Christ doth his work by degrees; but if we mind it not, and lazily expect that he should make us perfect, how will it ever be? for God will not save us without us; and as far as we hope for anything, we must endeavour after it, for Christian hope is not a devout sloth, but an encouragement to diligence.

2. We pray for perfection, and therefore we must endeavour after

it, otherwise our prayers are a mockery. We pray, Mat. vi. 8, and 1 Thes. v. 23, 'The God of peace sanctify you throughout, even your whole body, soul, and spirit.' We pray for complete sanctification in hope to obtain it. Prayer is not for God's sake, but ours—a solemn binding ourselves to use the means, that we may obtain the blessings that we ask.

3. In our making covenant, we purpose to do the whole will of God; now where there is a purpose, there must be an endeavour and a progress, for otherwise it is not made with a true heart, Heb. x. 22. A man may purpose duty in a pang, which afterward he retracts in his conversation and practice; he may wish for perfection, like it in the general, not considering it as exclusive of his beloved lusts, but there he will be excused. Yea, he may sincerely purpose it, yet be faint and slack in his endeavours. Therefore, we need to be exhorted continually to be more earnest and diligent in holiness, to avoid 'all appearance of evil,' 1 Thes. v. 22. Not to allow ourselves in the omission of any known duty, James iv. 13, or the commission of any known sin, though never so near and dear to us: Ps. xviii. 23, 'I was upright before thee, and kept myself from mine iniquity.' Therefore, unless we comply with these exhortations, and set ourselves sincerely to do the whole will of God, the challenge will be brought against us which was brought against the church of Sardis, 'I have not found thy works perfect before God,' Rev. iii. 2. Your vows were good, but your practice is not answerable.

4. Consider the comfort and peace of that man who doth more and more press towards perfection: Ps. xxxvii. 37, 'Mark the perfect man, behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.' They have a sweet life, and a happy close, a tolerable passage through the world, and a comfortable passage out of the world.

For means:—

1. See that the work be begun, for there must be converting grace before there can be confirming grace, life before there be strength and growth, as there must be fire before it can be blown up; for what good will it do to blow a dead coal, to seek strength before we have life? It is as if we should give food or physic to a dead man. The secure and impenitent are not to be confirmed and strengthened, but humbled and changed. We must first choose God for our portion before we can be exhorted to cleave to God, Acts xi. 23. First, the perfection of sincerity before the perfection of growth and progress, the measures and degrees following the real being of grace in the soul.

2. If you would be perfect, the radical graces must be strengthened, which are faith, hope, and love; strong faith, fervent love, lively hope. Such a faith as realiseth the unseen glory, and giveth such a deep sense of the world to come, as that you are willing to venture all upon the hopes of it; such a hope as sets the heart upon glory to come, as present things do not greatly move us; such a love as levelleth all our actions to God's glory, and our eternal enjoyment of him, Jude 20, 21.

3. Use the means with all seriousness and good conscience. These conduce to perfect what is lacking to your faith, to root you, ground

you in love, confirm you in hope, that the thoughts of heaven may be more affecting and engaging. Now the principal means are the word, and sacraments, and prayer.

[1.] In the word you have principles of faith, obligations to love, and arguments of hope; therefore it is said, God buildeth us up by the word of his grace, Acts xx. 32.

[2.] The sacraments strengthen faith, hope, and love, as signs and seals of the love of God, through Jesus Christ, in the new covenant, that so our consolation may be more strong. They strengthen our faith and hope, as a bond or a vow: so they excite and engage our love and obedience: we bind ourselves to God anew, to pursue our everlasting hopes, whatever they cost us. Our great diseases are proneness to evil and backwardness to good: we check the one and cherish the other.

[3.] Prayer; for it is God that perfects us, 1 Peter v. 10. He must be sought to; his blessing maketh the means effectual.

4. Think much and often of your perfect blessedness, which you expect according to promise, which will quicken and excite you to more diligence. There is a time coming when the mind shall be filled with as much light, and the heart with as much love and joy, as the capacity of it is able to contain. There will be:—

[1.] A complete vision of God and Christ, 1 Cor. xiii. 12. No desire of the mind shall be unfilled or unsatisfied with the knowledge of God in Christ.

[2.] A complete possession and fruition of God. Here we are in a waiting, expecting, longing posture, but there is a plenary fruition; we are filled up with all the fulness of God, Eph. iii. 19, and 1 Cor. i. 30. God is all in all.

[3.] A complete similitude and transformation into the image of Christ, 1 John iii. 2; Ps. xvii. 15. Here grace is mingled with corruption; we are like God by the first-fruits of the Spirit, but unlike him by the remainders of corruption; but in heaven we shall be wholly like him. Here we resemble Christ, but we also resemble Adam, yea, and often show forth more of Adam than Jesus; but there we only show forth the holiness and purity of Christ, his image shineth in us without spot and blemish.

[4.] A complete delectation arising from all the rest, the vision, fruition, and likeness of God, Ps. xvi. 11. Those delights are full and perpetual: our great business will be to love what we see, and our great happiness to have what we love. This is our never-failing delight; we enter into our Master's joy, Mat. xxv. and 1 Peter iv. 13, 'That when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad with an exceeding joy.' The Lord hath reserved the fulness of his people's joy until that time when sorrow will be no more.

Use 2. Are we perfect, that is, grown Christians in the way to perfection?

The notes of it are:—

1. When there is such a base esteem of worldly things, that our affections are weakened to them every day. One half of religion is dying to the world, as the other half is living to God, the mortifying of self-love, and the strengthening and increasing our love to God.

Self-love is gratified by the pleasures, honours, and profits of the world; so love to God aimeth at the enjoyment of God, when we get above the hopes and fears of the world, and the delights of sense. 'I am crucified to the world,' Gal. vi. 14, when everything is 'loss and dung' for Christ's sake.

2. When more unsatisfied with present degrees of holiness, with a constant endeavour to grow better. Our maimed and defective service is a real trouble to us; we bewail our wants and imperfections; I cannot do what I would: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' It is the grief and shame of your hearts that you serve God no better; you are still groaning, longing, striving after greater perfection: but when you allow yourselves in your imperfections, and digest failings without remorse, you are weaklings in Christianity. A true Christian desireth the highest degree of holiness, and to be freed from everything that is sin, cannot sit down contented with any low degree of grace; it is a trouble to him that he knoweth and loveth God no more, and serveth him no better; his smallest sins are a greater burden to him than the greatest bodily wants and sufferings, Rom. vii. 23, 24.

3. Such are more swayed by love than fear. Weak Christians are most obedient when most in fear of hell; but the more we love the Lord our God with all our hearts, the more we advance towards our final estate. At first our pride and sensuality beareth sway and rule in us, and have no resistance, but now and then some frightenings and ineffectual checks from the fears of hell. Such they¹ are not converted yet. And if the sense of religion do more prevail upon us, yet our condition is more troublous than comfortable, and all our business is to escape the everlasting misery which we fear; and so we may forsake the practice of those grosser sins which breed our fears, or perform some duties that may best fortify us against them. But this religion is animated by fear alone, without the love of God and holiness, that is only preparative to religion, near the kingdom of God; but when really converted, we have the Spirit of his Son inclining us to God as a Father, Gal. iv. 6. But as yet the spirit of adoption produceth but weak effects; we differ little from a servant; it is 'perfect love casteth out fear,' 1 John iv. 18. When the soul loveth God, mindeith God, and is inclined to the ways of God, delighteth in them as they lead to God, then we are in a better progress, and more prepared for our final estate: his great motive is love, his great end is perfect love. For the present he would serve him better, because he delighteth in his ways. 'Oh, how I love thy law!' Ps. cxix. 97, and ver. 140, 'Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.' They are willing and ready for God; these are thoroughly settled in a Christian course.

4. The grown Christian is more humble, he seeth more of his defects than others do. Weak Christians are more liable to be puffed up than the wiser and stronger; for the more men increase in grace, whether knowledge or holiness, the more they know their emptiness, unmortifiedness, and manifold sins and failings, the more they know of the jealousy of God's holiness, of the evil of sin, of the strictness of the covenant, have a deeper sense of their obligations to God, and

¹ Qu. 'such as they who?'—ED.

have more experience of their own slippery hearts : sin is more a burden to them than ever they see ; they have more¹ difficulties to grapple with, and all this keepeth them humble and low in their own eyes. All this is spoken to press you to look to this growth and progress which is our perfection. By the way, he that thinketh he hath grace enough to be saved, and careth for no more, dealeth more niggardly with God than he would do in the world ; if a man hath bread enough to keep him from starving, would he be content ? There is no truth where no care of growth ; if our condition be safe, it is not sure to us.

¹ Qu. ' than ever ; they see they have &c. ' 1—Ed.