

SANCTIFICATION

A

PROGRESSIVE WORK.

CHAP. II.

Sanctification described. With the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit therein; which is progressive. The way and means whereby holiness is increased in believers; especially by faith and love, whose exercise is required in all duties of obedience: as, also, those graces whose exercise is occasional. The growth of holiness expressed in an allusion unto that of plants, with an insensible progress. Renders grace therein to be greatly admired; and is discerned in the answerableness of the work of the Spirit in sanctification and supplication. Objections against the progressive nature of holiness removed.

HAVING passed through the consideration of the general concernments of the work of sanctification, I shall, in the next place, give a description of it, and then explain it more particularly in its principal parts. And this I shall do, but under this express caution, that I do not hope nor design at once to represent the life, glory, and beauty of it, or to comprise all things that eminently belong unto it. Only I shall set up some *way-marks* that may guide us in our progress, or future inquiry into the nature and glory of it. And so I say, that,

Sanctification is an immediate work of the Spirit of God on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God, according unto the tenor and terms of the new covenant, by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Or more briefly; it is the universal renovation of our natures, by the Holy Spirit, into the image of God, through Jesus Christ. Hence it follows, that our holiness, which is the fruit and effect of this work, the work as terminated in us, as it compriseth the renewed principle or image of God wrought in us, so it consists in a holy obedience unto God, by

Jesus Christ, according to the terms of the covenant of grace, from the principle of a renewed nature. Our apostle expresseth the whole more briefly yet; namely, *He that is in Christ Jesus is a new creature*; 2 Cor. v. 17. For herein he expresseth both the *renovation* of our natures, the *endowment* of them with a new spiritual principle of life and operation, with actings towards God suitable thereunto. I shall take up the *first general description* of it, and, in the consideration of its parts, give some account of the nature of the work and its effects; and then shall distinctly prove and confirm the *true nature* of it, wherein it is opposed or called into question.

I. It is, as was before proved, and is by all confessed, *the work in us of the Spirit of God*. It is the renovation of the Holy Ghost whereby we are saved. And a real, internal, powerful, physical work it is, as we have proved before abundantly, and shall afterward more fully confirm. He doth not make us holy only by persuading us so to be. He doth not only require us to be holy, propose unto us motives unto holiness, give us convictions of its necessity, and thereby excite us unto the pursuit and attainment of it; though this he doth also by the word and ministration thereof. It is too high an impudency for any one to pretend an owning of the gospel, and yet to deny a work of the Holy Ghost in our sanctification. And, therefore, both the old and new Pelagians did and do avow a work of his herein. But what is it that really they ascribe unto him? merely the exciting our own abilities, aiding and assisting us in and unto the exercise of our own native power, which, when all is done, leaves the work to be our own and not his, and to us must the glory and praise of it be ascribed. But we have already sufficiently proved, that the things thus promised of God, and so effected, are really wrought by the exceeding greatness of the power of the Spirit of God; and this will yet afterward be made more particularly to appear.

2. This work of *sanctification* differs from that of *regeneration*, as on other accounts, so especially on that of the manner of their being wrought. The work of regeneration is *instantaneous*, consisting in one single creating act. Hence it is not capable of degrees in any subject. No one is more or less regenerate than another; every one in the world is absolutely so, or not so, and that equally, although there

are degrees in their state on other reasons. But this work of sanctification is *progressive* and admits of degrees. One may be more sanctified and more holy than another, who is yet truly sanctified and truly holy. It is begun at once, and carried on gradually. But this observation being of great importance, and such as, if rightly weighed, will contribute much light unto the nature of the whole work of sanctification and holiness, I shall divert in this chapter unto such an explanation and confirmation of it as may give an understanding and furtherance herein.

1. An *increase* and *growth* in sanctification or holiness is frequently in the Scripture enjoined us, and frequently promised unto us. So speaks the apostle Peter in a way of command; 2 Pet. iii. 18. ‘Fall not,’ be not cast down, ‘from your own steadfastness; but grow, or increase, in grace.’ It is not enough that we decay not in our spiritual condition, that we be not diverted and carried off from a steady course in obedience by the power of temptations, but an endeavour after an improvement, an increase, a thriving in grace, that is, in holiness, is required of us. And a compliance with this command is that which our apostle so commendeth in the Thessalonians; 2 Epist. i. 3. namely, the exceeding growth of their faith, and abounding of their love; that is, the thriving and increase of those graces in them; that which is called ‘increasing with the increase of God;’ Col. ii. 19. or the increase in holiness which God requires, accepts, approves, by supplies of spiritual strength from Jesus Christ our head, as it is there expressed.

The work of holiness in its beginning is but like seed cast into the earth; namely, the *seed of God* whereby we are born again. And it is known how seed that is cast into the earth doth grow and increase: being variously cherished and nourished, it is in its nature to take root and to spring up, bringing forth fruit. So is it with the principle of grace and holiness. It is small at first, but being received in good and honest hearts, made so by the Spirit of God, and there nourished and cherished, it takes root and brings forth fruit. And both these, even the first planting and the increase of it, are both equally from God by his Spirit. He that begins this good work doth also perform it to the day of Jesus Christ; Phil. i. 6. And this he doth two ways.

First, By *increasing* and strengthening those graces of holiness which we have received and been engaged in the exercise of. There are some graces whose exercise doth not depend on any outward occasions, but they are, and that in their actual exercise, absolutely necessary unto the least degree of the life of God; such are faith and love. No man doth, no man can, live to God, but in the exercise of these graces. Whatever duties towards God men may perform, if they are not enlivened by faith and love, they belong not unto that spiritual life whereby we live to God. And these graces are capable of degrees, and so of increase. For so we read expressly of little faith and great faith, weak and strong faith, both true and the same in the substance, but differing in degrees. So also is there fervent love, and that which comparatively is but cold. These graces, therefore, in carrying on the work of sanctification, are gradually increased. So the disciples prayed our Saviour that he would increase their faith; Luke xvii. 5. that is, add unto its light, confirm it in its assent, multiply its acts, and make it strong against its assaults, that it might work more effectually in difficult duties of obedience, which they had an especial regard unto, as is evident from the context. For they pray for this increase of faith upon the occasion of our Saviour's enjoining frequent forgiveness of offending brethren, a duty not at all easy nor pleasing to flesh and blood. And the apostle prays for the Ephesians, 'that they may be rooted and grounded in love;' chap. iii. 17. that is, that by the increase and strengthening of their love, that may be more established in all the duties of it. See 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13.

These graces being the springs and spirits of our holiness, in the increase of them in us the work of sanctification is carried on and universal holiness increased. And this is done by the Holy Spirit several ways.

1. By *exciting* them unto frequent actings. Frequency of *acts* doth *naturally* increase and strengthen the habits whence they proceed. And in these spiritual habits of faith and love it is so, moreover, by God's appointment. They grow and thrive in and by their exercise; Hos. vi. 3. The want thereof is the principal means of their decay. And there are two ways whereby the Holy Spirit excites the graces of faith and love unto frequent acts.

(1.) He doth it *morally*, by proposing their objects suitably and seasonably unto them. This he doth by his ordinances of worship, especially the preaching of the word. God in Christ, the promises of the covenant, and other proper objects of our faith and love, being proposed unto us, these graces are drawn out unto their exercise. And this is one principal advantage which we have by attendance on the dispensation of the word in a due manner; namely, that by presenting those spiritual truths, which are the object of our faith unto our minds, and those spiritual good things which are the object of our love unto our affections, both these graces are drawn forth into frequent actual exercise. And we are greatly mistaken if we suppose we have no benefit by the word beyond what we retain in our memories, though we should labour for that also. Our chief advantage lies in the excitation which is thereby given unto our faith and love to their proper exercise. And hereby are these graces kept alive, which without this would decay and wither. Herein doth the Holy Spirit 'take the things of Christ and shew them unto us;' John xvi. 14, 15. He represents them unto us in the preaching of the word as the proper objects of our faith and love. And so brings to remembrance the things spoken by Christ; chap. xiv. 26. that is, in the dispensation of the word he minds us of the gracious words and truths of Christ, proposing them to our faith and love. And herein lies the secret profiting and thriving of believers under the preaching of the gospel, which it may be they are not sensible of themselves. By this means, are many thousands of acts of faith and love drawn forth, whereby those graces are exercised and strengthened, and consequently holiness is increased. And the word, by the actings of faith, being mixed with it, as Heb. iv. 2. increaseth it by its incorporation.

(2.) The Spirit doth it *really* and internally. He dwelleth in believers, preserving in them the root and principle of all their grace by his own immediate power. Hence all graces in their exercise are called the 'fruits of the Spirit;' Gal. v. 22, 23. He brings them forth from the stock that he hath planted in the heart. And we cannot act any one grace without his effectual operation therein. 'God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure;'

Phil. ii. 13. That is, there is no part of our wills singly and separately from him in obedience, but it is the operation of the Spirit of God in us so far as it is spiritual and holy: he is the immediate author of every good or gracious acting in us. 'For in us, that is, in our flesh (and of ourselves we are but flesh), there dwelleth no good.' Wherefore the Spirit of God dwelling in believers, doth effectually excite and stir up their graces unto frequent exercise and actings whereby they are increased and strengthened. And there is nothing in the whole course of our walking before God that we ought to be more careful about, than that we grieve not, that we provoke not, this good and Holy Spirit, whereon he should withhold his gracious aids and assistances from us. This, therefore, is the first way whereby the work of sanctification is gradually carried on, by the Holy Ghost exciting our graces unto frequent actings; whereby they are increased and strengthened.

2. He doth it by supplying believers with *experiences* of the truth, and *reality*, and excellency, of the things that are believed. Experience is the food of all grace, which it grows and thrives upon. Every taste that faith obtains of divine love and grace, or how gracious the Lord is, adds to its measure and stature. Two things therefore must briefly be declared: (1.) That the experience of the reality, excellency, power, and efficacy of the things that are believed, is an effectual means of increasing faith and love: (2.) That it is the Holy Ghost which gives us this experience. For the first, God himself expostulates with the church how its faith came to be so weak when it had so great experience of him, or of his power and faithfulness; Isa. xl. 27, 28. 'Hast thou not heard, hast thou not known? How then sayest thou that God hath forsaken thee?' And our apostle affirms, that the consolations which he had experimentally received from God enabled him unto the discharge of his duty towards others in trouble; 2 Cor. vii. 4. For herein we prove, or do really approve of, as being satisfied in 'the good and acceptable and perfect will of God;' Rom. xii. 2. And this is that which the apostle prayeth for in the behalf of the Colossians, chap. ii. 2. I may say, that he who knoweth not how faith is encouraged and strengthened by especial experiences of the reality, power, and spiritual efficacy on the soul of the things

believed, never was made partaker of any of them. How often doth David encourage his own faith and others from his former experiences which were pleaded also by our Lord Jesus Christ to the same purpose, in his great distress; Psal. xxii. 9, 10. (Secondly), That it is the Holy Ghost who giveth us all our spiritual experiences, needs no other consideration to evince but only this, that in them consists all our consolation. His work and office it is to administer consolation unto believers, as being the only Comforter of the church. Now he administereth comfort no other way but by giving unto the minds and souls of believers, a spiritual sensible experience of the reality and power of the things we do believe. He doth not comfort us by words, but by things. Other means of spiritual consolation I know none, and I am sure this never fails. Give unto a soul an experience, a taste of the love and grace of God in Christ Jesus, and be its condition what it will, it cannot refuse to be comforted. And hereby doth he 'shed abroad the love of God in our hearts;' Rom. v. 5. whereby all graces are cherished and increased.

3. He doth it by working immediately an actual increase of these graces in us. I have shewed that these are capable of improvement, and of an addition of degrees unto them. Now they are originally the immediate work and product of the Spirit of God in us, as hath been abundantly evinced. And as he first works and creates them, so he increaseth them. Hereby they that are 'feeble become as David;' Zech. xii. 8. That is, those whose graces were weak, whose faith was infirm, and whose love was languid, shall, by the supplies of the Spirit and the increase given by him unto them, become strong and vigorous. To this purpose are promises multiplied in the Scripture, which in our constant supplications we principally respect. This is that which the schoolmen after Austin call *Gratiam corroborantem*, that is, the working of the Holy Spirit in the increasing and strengthening of grace received. See Eph. iii. 16, 17. Col. i. 10, 11. Isa. xl. 29. And this is the principal cause and means of the gradual increase of holiness in us, or the carrying on of the work of sanctification; Psal. cxxxviii. 8.

Secondly, There are graces whose exercise is more *occasional*, and not always actually necessary as unto the life of God: that is, it is not necessary that they be always in actual

exercise, as faith and love are to be. With respect unto these, holiness is increased by the addition of one to another, until we are brought on several occasions to the practice and exercise of them all. For the addition of the new exercise of any grace belongs unto the gradual carrying on of the work of sanctification. And hereunto all things that befall us in this world, all our circumstances are laid in a suberviency by the wisdom of God. All our relations, all our afflictions, all our temptations, all our mercies, all our enjoyments, all occurrences are suited to a continual adding of the exercise of one grace to another, wherein holiness is increased. And if we make not use of them to that purpose, we miss of all the benefit and advantage we might have of them; and disappoint what lies in us, the design of divine love and wisdom in them. This is given us in charge, 2 Pet. i. 5—7. ‘ Besides all this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness charity.’ The end why this injunction is given us, is, that we may ‘ escape the corruption that is in the world through lust;’ ver. 3. that is, have all our corruptions thoroughly subdued, and our souls thoroughly sanctified. To this end are the promises given us, and a divine spiritual nature is bestowed upon us. But will that suffice, or is there no more required of us unto that end? Yes, saith the apostle, this great work will not be effected, unless you use your utmost diligence, and endeavour to add the exercise of all the graces of the Spirit one to another as occasion shall require. There is a method in this concatenation of graces from first to last, and an especial reason for each particular, or why the apostle requires, that such a grace should be added unto such an one in the order laid down, which at present I shall not inquire into. But, in general, he intends that every grace is to be exercised according to its proper season, and especial occasion. Hereby, also, is the work of sanctification gradually carried on, and holiness increased. And this addition of one grace unto another, with the progress of holiness thereby, is also from the Holy Ghost. And three ways there are, whereby he accomplisheth his work herein. 1. By ordering things so towards us, and

bringing of us into such conditions, as wherein the exercise of these graces shall be required and necessary. All the afflictions and trials which he bringeth the church into, have no other end or design. So the apostle James expresseth it; chap. i. 2—4. ‘My brethren, count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.’ These temptations are trials upon afflictions, troubles, persecutions, and the like. But take them in any other sense, it is the same unto our purpose. These are all guided unto us by Christ and his Spirit; for it is he who rebukes and chastens us. But what is his end therein? It is that faith may be exercised, and patience employed, and one grace added unto another, that they may carry us on towards perfection. So he bringeth us into that condition, as wherein we shall assuredly miscarry, if we add not the exercise of one grace unto another. 2. In this state of things he effectually minds us of our duty, and what graces ought to be put upon their exercise. We may dispute whether it be better to act faith, or to despond; to add patience under the continuance of our trials, or to trust unto ourselves and irregularly to seek after deliverance, or divert unto other satisfactions. Then doth he cause us ‘to hear a word behind us, saying, This is the way, walk in it, when we turn to the right hand, and when we turn to the left;’ Isa. xxx. 21. When we are at a loss and know not what to do, and are ready, it may be, to consult with flesh and blood, and to divert to irregular courses, he speaks effectually to us, saying, No, that is not your way, but this is it; namely, to act faith, patience, submission to God, adding one grace to another, binding our hearts thereby to our duty. 3. He actually excites and sets all needful graces at work in the way and manner before spoken unto. This then is to be fixed, that all this increase of holiness is immediately the work of the Holy Ghost, who therein gradually carries on his design of sanctifying us throughout in our whole spirit, souls, and bodies. There is in our regeneration and habitual grace received, a nature bestowed on us capable of growth and increase, and that is all; if it be left unto itself, it will not thrive, it will decay and die. The actual supplies of the Spirit are the waterings

that are the immediate cause of its increase. It wholly depends on continual influences from God. He cherisheth and improves the work he hath begun with new and fresh supplies of grace every moment. Isa. xxvii. 3. 'I the Lord water it every moment.' And it is the Spirit which is this water, as the Scripture every where declares. God the Father takes on him the care in this matter; 'he watcheth over his vineyard to keep it.' The Lord Christ is the head, fountain, and treasure of all actual supplies: and the Spirit is the efficient cause communicating them unto us from him. From hence it is, that any grace in us is kept alive one moment, that it is ever acted in one single duty, that ever it receives the least measure of increase or strengthening. With respect unto all these, it is that our apostle saith, 'Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;' Gal. ii. 20. Spiritual life and living by it, in all the acts of it, are immediately from Christ.

I concern not myself much how *moral virtue* that is no more is preserved and sustained in the minds and lives of men, though I am not ignorant of the precepts, directions, and instructions, which are given unto that end by some of old, and some of late. But for *grace* and *holiness* we have infallible assurance, that the being, life, continuance, and all the actings of it in any of the sons of men, depend merely and only upon their relation unto that spring and fountain of all grace which is in Christ, and the continual supplies of it by the Holy Spirit, whose work it is to communicate them; Col. iii. 3. John xv. 5. Col. ii. 19.

There is no man who hath any grace that is true and saving, that hath any seed, any beginning of sanctification or holiness, but that the Holy Spirit, by his watchful care over it, and supplies of it, is able to preserve it, to extricate it from difficulties, to free it from opposition, and to increase it unto its full measure and perfection. Wherefore, 'let the hands that hang down, be lifted up, and the feeble knees be strengthened;' we have to do with him who will not 'quench the smoking flax nor break the bruised reed.' And on the other side, there is none who hath received grace in such a measure, nor hath so confirmed it by constant uninterrupted exercise, as that he can preserve it one moment, or act it in any one instance, or duty, without the continual supplies of

new actual grace and help from him, who worketh in us to will and to do. For saith our Lord Christ unto his apostles, and in them to all believers, the best and strongest of them, 'Without me ye can do nothing;' John xv. 5. And they, who of themselves can do nothing, that is, in a way of living unto God, cannot of themselves preserve grace, act it, and increase it, which are the greatest things we do, or are wrought in us, in this world. Wherefore, God hath in infinite wisdom, so ordered the dispensation of his love and grace unto believers, that all of them living upon the continual supplies of his Spirit, none may have cause on the one hand to faint or despond, nor occasion on the other unto self-confidence, or elation of mind, that so 'no flesh may glory in itself, but he that glorieth may glory in the Lord.' And therefore, as he greatly encourageth the weak, the fearful, the faint, the disconsolate, and dejected, and that by the engagement of all the holy properties of his nature, in and unto their assistance; Isa. xxxv. 3—6. xl. 27—31. so he warns them who suppose themselves strong, steadfast, and immoveable, 'not to be high-minded but fear;' Rom. xi. 20. because the whole issue of things depends on his sovereign supplies of grace. And seeing he hath promised in the covenant to continue faithfully these supplies unto us, there is ground of faith given unto all, and occasion of presumption administered unto none.

But it will be said, that if not only the *beginning* of grace, sanctification, and holiness, be from God, but the *carrying of it on*, and the *increase* of it also be from him, and not only so in general, but that all the *actings of grace*, and every act of it, be an immediate effect of the Holy Spirit, then what need is there that we should take any pains in this thing ourselves, or use our own endeavours to grow in grace or holiness as we are commanded; if God *worketh all himself in us*, and without his effectual operation in us *we can do nothing*, there is no place left for our *diligence, duty, or obedience*.

Ans. 1. This objection we must expect to meet withal at every turn. Men will not believe there is a consistency between *God's effectual grace*, and our *diligent obedience*; that is, they will not believe what is plainly, clearly, distinctly, revealed in the Scripture, and which is suited unto the experience of all that truly believe, because they cannot, it may be,

comprehend it within the compass of *carnal reason*. 2. Let the apostle answer this objection for this once; 2 Pet. i. 3. ‘His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and to godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.’ If all things that pertain unto life and godliness, among which doubtless is the *preservation and increase* of grace, be given unto us by the *power of God*; if from him we receive that *divine nature*, by virtue whereof our corruptions are subdued, then I pray what need is there of any endeavours of our own? The whole work of sanctification is wrought in us, it seems, and that by the power of God: we, therefore, may let it alone, and leave it unto him whose it is, whilst we are negligent, secure, and at ease. Nay, saith the apostle, this is not the use which the grace of God is to be put unto. The consideration of it is, or ought to be, the principal motive and encouragement unto all diligence for the increase of holiness in us. For so he adds immediately, ver. 5. καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο δὲ, ‘but also for this cause,’ or because of the gracious operations of the divine power in us; ‘giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue’ as before. These objectors and this apostle were very diversely minded in these matters; what they make an insuperable discouragement unto diligence in obedience, that he makes the greatest motive and encouragement thereunto. 3. I say, from this consideration, it will unavoidably follow, that we ought continually to wait and depend on God for supplies of his Spirit and grace, without which we can do nothing: that God is more the author by his grace of the good we do than we are ourselves (not I, but the grace of God that was with me): that we ought to be careful that by our negligences and sins we provoke not the Holy Spirit to withhold his aids and assistances, and so to leave us to ourselves, in which condition we can do nothing that is spiritually good; these things, I say, will unavoidably follow on the doctrine before declared; and if any one be offended at them, it is not in our power to render them relief.

I shall close the discourse on this subject with some considerations of that *similitude* by which the Scripture so fre-

quently represents the *gradual* improvement of grace and holiness. And this is the *growth of trees and plants*. Hos. xiv. 5, 6. 'I will be as the dew unto Israel, he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots at Lebanon; his branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon.' Isa. xlv. 3, 4. 'I will pour water on him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground, I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring, and they shall spring up as among the grass, as the willows by the water-courses.' And so in other places very many. And we may know that this similitude is singularly instructive, or it would not have been so frequently made use of to this purpose. Some few instances tending to administer light in this matter, I shall briefly reflect upon.

1. These *trees and plants* have the principle of their growth in themselves. They do not grow immediately from external adventitious aid and furtherance; they grow from their own seminal virtue and radical moisture. It is no otherwise in the progress of sanctification and holiness. It hath a root, a seed, a principle of growth and increase in the soul of him that is sanctified. All grace is immortal seed, and contains in it a living growing principle. That which hath not in itself a life and power of growth is not grace. And therefore what duties soever any men do perform, whereunto they are either guided by natural light, or which they are urged unto by convictions from the word, if they proceed not from a principle of spiritual life in the heart, they are no fruits of holiness nor do belong thereunto. The water of grace which is from Christ, is a 'well of water springing up unto everlasting life,' in them on whom it is bestowed; John iv. 14. It is therefore the nature of holiness to thrive and grow, as it is of trees or plants that have their seminal virtue in themselves after their kind.

2. A tree or plant must be *watered* from above, or it will not thrive and grow by virtue of its own *seminal* power. If a drought cometh it will wither or decay. Wherefore, where God mentioneth this growth he ascribes it unto his watering. 'I will be as the dew,' and 'I will pour water,' is the especial cause of it. It is so in this carrying on of holiness. There is a nature received capable of increase and growth; but if it be left unto itself it will not thrive, it will decay

and die. Wherefore God is unto it as the dew, and pours water on it by the actual supplies of the Spirit, as we have shewed before.

3. The *growth of trees and plants* is secret and *imperceptible*; nor is discerned but in the effects and consequences of it. The most watchful eye can discern little of its motion. ‘Crescit occulto velut arbor ævo:’ It is no otherwise in the progress of holiness. It is not immediately discernible, either by themselves in whom it is, or by others that make observation of it. It lies only under the eye of him by whom it is wrought: only by the fruits and effects of it is made manifest. And some indeed, especially in some seasons, do plainly and evidently thrive and grow, springing up like the willows by the water-courses. Though their growth in itself is indiscernible, yet it is plain they have grown. Such we ought all to be. The growth of some I say is manifest on every trial, on every occasion; their profiting is visible to all. And as some say that the growth of plants is not by a constant insensible progress, but they increase by sudden gusts and motions, which may sometimes be discerned in the openings of buds and flowers; so the growth of believers consists principally in some intense vigorous actings of grace on great occasions; as of faith, love, humility, self-denial, bounty. And he who hath not some experience of such actings of grace in especial instances, can have little evidence of his growth. Again, there are trees and plants that have the principle of life and growth in them, but yet are so withering and unthrifty that you can only discern them to be alive. And so it is with too many believers: they are all ‘trees planted in the garden of God,’ some thrive, some decay for a season, but the growth of the best is secret.

From what hath been proved, it is evident that the work of sanctification is a *progressive* work, that holiness is gradually carried on in us by it towards perfection. It is neither wrought nor completed at once in us as is regeneration, nor doth it cease under any attainments or in any condition of life, but is thriving and carried on. A river continually fed by a living fountain may as soon end its streams before it come to the ocean, as a stop be put to the course and progress of grace before it issues in glory. ‘For the path of

the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more to the perfect day ;' Prov. iv. 18. So is their path wherein they are led and conducted by the Holy Spirit, even as the morning light which after it once appears, though it may be sometimes clouded, yet faileth not until it arrive unto its perfection. And as the wisdom, patience, faithfulness, and power which the Holy Spirit of God exerciseth herein are unutterable, so are they constantly admired by all that are interested in them : so are they by the psalmist ; Psal. lxxi. 8, 9. xxxi. 17. Who is there who hath made any diligent observation of his own heart and ways, and what have been the workings of the grace of God in him and towards him, to bring him unto the stature and measure whereunto he is arrived, that doth not admire the watchful care and powerful workings of the Spirit of God therein ? The principle of our holiness as in us is weak and infirm, because it is in us ; in some to so low a degree as is oft-times unto themselves imperceptible. This he preserves and cherisheth that it shall not be overpowered by corruptions and temptations. Among all the glorious works of God, next unto that of redemption by Jesus Christ, my soul doth most admire this of the Spirit in preserving the seed and principle of holiness in us, as a spark of living fire in the midst of the ocean, against all corruptions and temptations wherewith it is impugned. Many breaches are made in and upon our course of obedience by the incursions of actual sins, these he cures and makes up, healing our backslidings and repairing our decays. And he acts the grace we have received by constant fresh supplies. He wants much of the comfort and joy of a spiritual life, who doth not diligently observe the ways and means whereby it is preserved and promoted. And it is no small part of our sin and folly when we are negligent herein.

All believers are no doubt in some measure convinced hereof, not only from the testimonies given unto it in the Scripture, but also from their own experience. And there is nothing in themselves which they may more distinctly learn it from, than the nature and course of their prayers, with the workings of their hearts, minds, and affections in them. Let profane persons deride it whilst they please, it is the Spirit of God as a Spirit of grace, that enables believers

to pray and make intercession according to the mind of God. And herein as he is the Spirit of supplications, he copyeth out and expresth what he worketh in them as the Spirit of sanctification. In teaching us to pray, he teacheth us what and how he worketh in us. And if we wisely consider his working in our hearts by prayer, we may understand much of his working upon our hearts by grace. It is said, that he who 'searcheth the hearts,' that is God himself, 'knoweth the mind of the Spirit,' in the intercessions he worketh in us; Rom. viii. 27. There are secret powerful operations of the Spirit in prayer, that are discernible only to the great searcher of hearts. But we also ought to inquire and observe, so far as we may, what he leads us unto and guides us about, which is plainly his work in us. I do not think that the Spirit worketh supplications in us by an immediate, supernatural, divine afflatus, so as he inspired the prophets of old, who oft-times understood not the things uttered by themselves, but inquired afterward diligently into them. But I do say (let the proud carnal world despise it whilst they please, and at their peril), that the Spirit of God doth graciously in the prayers of believers, carry out and act their souls and minds in desires and requests, which for the matter of them are far above their natural contrivances and invention. And he who hath not experience hereof is a greater stranger unto these things than will at length be unto his advantage. By a diligent observance hereof we may know of what kind and nature the work of the Holy Ghost in us is, and how it is carried on. For how in general doth the Holy Spirit teach us and enable us to pray? It is by these three things. (1.) By giving us a spiritual insight into the promises of God and the grace of the covenant, whereby we know what to ask upon a spiritual view of the mercy and grace that God hath prepared for us. (2.) By acquainting us with and giving us an experience of our wants, with a deep sense of them, such as we cannot bear without relief. (3.) By creating and stirring up desires in the new creature, for his own preservation, increase, and improvement. And in answer unto these things, consisteth his whole work of sanctification in us. For it is his effectual communication unto us, of the grace and mercy prepared in the promises of the covenant through Jesus Christ; hereby doth he supply our

spiritual wants, and sets the new creature in life and vigour. So are our prayers an extract and copy of the work of the Holy Spirit in us, given us by himself. And, therefore, by whomsoever he is despised as a Spirit of supplication, he is so as a Spirit of sanctification also. Now consider what it is that in your prayers you most labour about? Is it not that the body, the power, the whole interest, of sin in you may be weakened, subdued, and at length destroyed? It is not that all the graces of the Spirit may be renewed daily, increased and strengthened, so as that you may be more ready and prepared for all duties of obedience? And what is all this but that holiness may be gradually progressive in your souls, that it may be carried on by new supplies and additions of grace, until it come to perfection?

It will be said, perhaps, by some, that they find neither in themselves nor others, by the best of their observation, that the work of sanctification is constantly progressive, or that holiness doth so grow and thrive wherever it is in sincerity. For, as for themselves, they have found grace more vigorous, active, and flourishing, in former days than of late; the streams of it were fresher and stronger at the spring of conversion than since they find them to be in their course. Hence are those complaints among many of their leanness, their weakness, their deadness, their barrenness. Nor were many of the saints in the Scripture without such complaints. And many may cry, Oh that it were with us as in our former days, in the days of our youth! Complaints of this nature do every where abound, and some are ready to conclude upon this consideration, that either sincere holiness is not so growing and progressive as is pretended, or that, indeed, they have no interest therein. Yea, the like may be said upon a diligent observation of others, churches and single professors; what evidence do they give, that the work of holiness is thriving in them? doth it not appear rather to be retrograde and under a constant decay?

I shall so far consider and remove this objection, as that the truth which we have asserted suffer not from it, and so be left as an empty notion; nor yet those altogether discouraged who come not up unto a full compliance with it. And this I shall do in the ensuing rules and observations.

1. *It is one thing what grace or holiness is suited unto in its*

own nature, and what is the ordinary or regular way of the procedure of the Spirit in the work of sanctification, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace; another what may occasionally fall out by indisposition and irregularity, or any other obstructing interposition in them, in whom the work is wrought. Under the first consideration the work is thriving and progressive, in the latter, the rule is liable to sundry exceptions. A child that hath a principle of life, a good natural constitution, and suitable food, will grow and thrive. But that which hath obstructions from within, or distempers and diseases, or falls and bruises, may be weak and thriftless. When we are regenerate we are as new-born babes, and ordinarily if we have the sincere milk of the word we shall grow thereby. But if we ourselves give way to temptations, corruptions, negligences, conformity to the world, is it any wonder if we are lifeless and thriftless? It suffices to confirm the truth of what we have asserted, that every one in whom is a principle of spiritual life, who is born of God, in whom the work of sanctification is begun, if it be not gradually carried on in him, if he thrive not in grace and holiness, if he go not from strength to strength, it is ordinarily from his own sinful negligence and indulgence unto carnal lusts, or love of this present world. Considering the time we have had, and the means we have enjoyed, what grown, what flourishing plants in faith, love, purity, self-denial, and universal conformity to Christ might many of us have been, who now are weak, withering, fruitless, and sapless, scarce to be distinguished from the thorns and briars of the world? It is time for us rather to be casting off every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, to be by all means stirring up ourselves unto a vigorous recovery of our first faith and love with an abundant growth in them, than to be complaining that the work of holiness doth not go on, and that before our wounds become incurable.

2. *It is one thing to have holiness really thriving in any soul, another for that soul to know it and to be satisfied in it; and these things may be separated; whereof there are many reasons.* But before I name them I must premise one necessary observation; and that is, Whereas this rule is proposed for the relief of such as are at a loss about their condition, and know not whether holiness be thriving in them or no, that these

have no concernment herein, who may at any time if they please, give themselves an account how matters go with them and on what grounds. For if men do indulge unto any predominant lust, if they live in the neglect of any known duty, or the practice of any way of deceit, if they suffer the world to devour the choicest increase of their souls, and formality to eat out the spirit, vigour, and life of holy duties, or any of these in a remarkable manner, I have nothing to offer unto them to manifest that holiness may thrive in them, although they discern it not. For undoubtedly it doth not do so, nor are they to entertain any hopes but that whilst they abide in such a condition, it will decay more and more. Such are to be awaked with violence, like men falling into a deadly lethargy, to be snatched as brands out of the fire, to be warned to recover their first faith and love, to repent and do their first works, lest their end should be darkness and sorrow for evermore. But as unto those who walk with God humbly and in sincerity, there may be sundry reasons given whence it is that holiness may be thriving in them, and yet not be discerned by them so to be. And, therefore, though holiness be wrought within ourselves and only there, yet there may be seasons wherein sincere humble believers may be obliged to believe the increase and growth of it in them when they perceive it not, so as to be sensible of it. For, (1.) it being the subject of so many gospel-promises it is a proper object of faith, or a thing that is to be believed. The promises are God's explanations of the grace of the covenant, both as to its nature and the manner of its operation. And they do not abound in any concernment of it more than this, that those who are partakers of it shall thrive and grow thereby. With what limitations they are bounded, and what is required on our part that we may have them fulfilled towards us, shall be afterward declared. But their accomplishment depends on God's faithfulness and not on our sense of it. Where, therefore, we do not openly lay an obstruction against it, as in the case now mentioned, we may, we ought to believe that they are fulfilled towards us, although we are not continually sensible thereof. And, (2.) it is our duty to grow and thrive in holiness. And what God requires of us, we are to believe that he will help us in, and doth so, whatever be our present sense and apprehen-

sion. And he who on these grounds can believe the growth of holiness in himself, though he have no sensible experience thereof, is in my judgment in as good, and perhaps a more safe condition than he, who through the vigorous working of spiritual affections is most sensible thereof. For it is certain, that such an one doth not by any wilful neglect, or indulgence unto any sin, obstruct the growth of holiness; for he that doth so cannot believe that it doth thrive in him, or is carried on, whatever his presumptions may be. And the life of faith, whereof this is a part, is every way a safe life. Besides, such a person is not in that danger of a vain elation of mind, and carelessness thereon, as others may be. For wherein we live by faith, and not at all by sense, we shall be humble and fear always: such an one not finding in himself the evidence of what he most desires, will be continually careful that he drive it not farther from him. But the reasons of this difficulty are:

(1.) The work itself, as hath been before declared at large, is *secret and mysterious*; and, therefore, as in some, I hope in many, there is the *reality* and essence of holiness, who yet can find nothing of it in themselves, nor perhaps any one else, but only Jesus Christ, who is of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord; so it may in the same *secret manner thrive*, as to its degrees in them, who yet perceive it not. There is not any thing in our whole course, that we ought to be more awake unto, than a diligent observation of the progress and decays of grace; for as the knowledge of them, is of the same importance unto us, with that of our duties, and comforts, so they are very hardly and difficultly to be discerned; nor will be so truly for our good and advantage, without our utmost diligence and spiritual wisdom in their observation. Hence, as we before observed, it is compared in the Scripture frequently unto the growth of ‘plants and trees;’ Hos. xiv. 5, 6. Isa. xlv. 3, 4. Now we know, that in those of them which are the most thrifty and flourishing, though we may perceive they are grown, yet we cannot discern their growing. And the apostle tells us, that as the ‘outward man perisheth, so the inward man is renewed day by day;’ 2 Cor. iv. 16. The perishing of the outward man is by those natural decays whereby it continually tends unto death and dissolution. And we know, many of us, how

hardly these insensible decays are discerned; unless some great and violent disease befall us, we rather know that we are enfeebled and weakened by age and infirmities, than perceive when or how. So is the inward man renewed in grace. It is by such secret ways and means, as that its growth and decays are hardly to be apprehended. And yet he who is negligent in this inquiry, walks at all peradventures with God, knows not whereabout he is in his way, whether he be nearer or farther off from his journey's end, than he was before. Write that man a fruitless and a thriftless Christian, who calls not himself to an account about his increases and decays in grace. David knew this work to be of so great importance, as that he would not trust to himself and ordinary assistances for the discharge of it, but earnestly calls in God to undertake it for him, and to acquaint him with it; Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24.

(2.) There may be some *perplexing temptations* befall the mind of a believer, or some corruption take advantage to break loose for a season, it may be for a long season, which may much gall the soul with its suggestions, and so trouble, disturb, and unquiet it, as that it shall not be able to make a right judgment of its grace and progress in holiness. A ship may be so tossed in a storm at sea, as that the most skilful mariners may not be able to discern whether they make any way in their intended course and voyage, whilst they are carried on with success and speed. In such cases, grace in its exercise is principally engaged in an opposition unto its enemy, which it hath to conflict withal; and so its thriving other ways is not discernible. If it should be inquired, how we may discern when grace is exercised and thrives in opposition unto corruptions and temptations; I say, that as great winds and storms do sometimes contribute to the fruit-bearing of trees and plants, so do corruptions and temptations unto the fruitfulness of grace and holiness. The wind comes with violence on the tree, ruffles its boughs, it may be, breaks some of them, beats off its buds, looseneth and shaketh its roots, and threatens to cast the whole to the ground: but by this means, the earth is opened and loosed about it, and the tree gets its roots deeper into the earth, whereby it receives more and fresh nourishment,

which renders it fruitful, though it bring not forth fruit visibly, it may be not till a good while after. In the assaults of temptations and corruptions, the soul is wofully ruffled and disordered, its leaves of profession are much blasted, and its beginnings of fruit-bearing much broken and retarded; but in the meantime, it secretly and invisibly casts out its roots of humility, self-abasement, mourning, in hidden and continual labouring of faith and love after that grace, whereby holiness doth really increase, and way is made for future visible fruitfulness. For,

(3.) God, who in infinite wisdom manageth the new creature or whole life of grace by his Spirit, doth so turn the *streams* of it, and so renew and change the especial kinds of its operations, as that we cannot easily trace his paths therein, and may therefore be often at a loss about it, as not knowing well what he is doing with us. For instance, it may be, the work of grace and holiness hath greatly put forth and evidenced itself in the affections which are renewed by it. Hence persons have great experience of readiness unto, delight and cheerfulness in, holy duties, especially those of immediate intercourse with God. For affections are quick and vigorous for the most part in the youth of profession: and the operations of them being sensible unto them in whom they are, and their fruits visible, they make persons seem always fresh and green in the ways of holiness. But it may be, after a while, it seems good to the sovereign disposer of this affair to turn, as it were, the streams of grace and holiness into another channel. He sees that the exercise of humility, godly sorrow, fear, diligent conflicting with temptations, that, it may be, strike at the very root of faith and love, are more needful for them. He will, therefore, so order his dispensations towards them, by afflictions, temptations, occasions of life in the world, as that they shall have new work to do, and all the grace they have be turned into a new exercise. Hereon, it may be, they find not that sensible vigour in their spiritual affections, nor that delight in spiritual duties, which they have done formerly. This makes them sometimes ready to conclude that grace is decayed in them, that the springs of holiness are drying up, and they know neither where nor what they are.

But yet, it may be, the real work of sanctification is still thriving and effectually carried on in them.

3. It is acknowledged that there may be, that there are in many, great *decays* in grace and holiness; that the work of sanctification goeth back in them, and that, it may be, universally and for a long season. Many actings of grace are lost in such persons, and the things that remain are ready to die. This the Scripture abundantly testifieth unto, and giveth us instances of. How often doth God charge his people with backsliding, barrenness, decays in faith and love? And the experience of the days wherein we live sufficiently confirm the truth of it. Are there not open and visible decays in many, as to the whole Spirit, all the duties and fruits of holiness? Cannot the best among us contribute somewhat to the evidence hereof from our own experience? What shall we say then, is there no sincere holiness where such decays are found? God forbid. But we must inquire the reasons whence this comes to pass, seeing this is contrary to the gradual progress of holiness in them that are sanctified, which we have asserted. And I answer two things unto it:

1. That these decays are *occasional and preternatural*, as to the true nature and constitution of the new creature, and a disturbance of the ordinary work of grace. They are diseases in our spiritual state, which it is not to be measured by. Are you dead and cold in duties, backward in good works, careless of your hearts and thoughts, addicted to the world? These things belong not to the state of sanctification but are enemies unto it, sicknesses and diseases in the spiritual constitution of the persons in whom they are.

2. Although our sanctification and growth in holiness be a work of the Holy Spirit, as the efficient cause thereof, yet is it our own work also in a way of *duty*. He hath prescribed unto us what shall be our part, what he expects from us, and requireth of us, that the work may be regularly carried on unto perfection, as was before declared. And there are two sorts of things which if we attend not unto in a due manner, the orderly progress of it will be obstructed and retarded. For,

(1.) The power and growth of any lust or corruption, and a compliance from them with temptations which is inseparable from the prevalency of any sin in us, lies directly against

this progress. If we allow or approve of any such thing in us, if we indulge unto any actings of sin, especially when known and grown frequent, in any one kind, when we neglect the use of the best means for the constant mortification of sin, which every enlightened soul understands to be necessary thereunto, there is, and will be increased, a universal decay in holiness, and not only in that particular corruption which is so spared and indulged. A disease in any one of the vitals or principal parts of the body weakens not only the part wherein it is, but the whole body itself, and vitiates the whole constitution by a sympathy of parts. And any particular lust indulged unto, vitiates the whole spiritual health, and weakens the soul in all duties of obedience.

(2.) There are some things required of us to this end, that holiness may thrive and be carried on in us. Such are the constant use of all ordinances and means appointed unto that end, a due observance of commanded duties in their season, with a readiness for the exercise of every especial grace in its proper circumstances. Now if we neglect these things, if we walk at all peradventures with God, attending neither to means nor duties, nor the exercise of grace as we should, we are not to wonder if we find ourselves decaying, yea, ready to die. Doth any man wonder to see a person formerly of a sound constitution grown weak and sickly, if he openly neglect all means of health, and contract all sorts of diseases by his intemperance? Is it strange that a nation should be sick and faint at heart, that grey hairs should be sprinkled upon it, that it should be poor and decaying, whilst consuming lusts with a strange neglect of all invigorating means do prevail in it? No more is it that a professing people should decay in holy obedience whilst they abide in the neglects expressed.

Having vindicated this assertion, I shall yet add a little farther improvement of it. And,

1. If the work of holiness be such a progressive thriving work in its own nature, if the design of the Holy Ghost in the use of means be to carry it on in us and increase it more and more unto a perfect measure, then is our diligence still to be continued to the same end and purpose. For, hereon depends our growth and thriving. It is required of us that we give all diligence unto the increase of grace; 2 Pet. i. and

that we abound therein ; 2 Cor. viii. 7. ‘abounding in all diligence ;’ and not only so, but that we ‘ shew the same diligence unto the end ;’ Heb. vi. 11. Whatever diligence you have used in the attaining or improving of holiness, abide in it unto the end, or we cast ourselves under decays, and endanger our souls. If we slack or give over as to our duty, the work of sanctification will not be carried on in a way of grace. And this is required of us, this is expected from us, that our whole lives be spent in a course of diligent compliance with the progressive work of grace in us. There are three grounds on which men do, or may neglect this duty whereon the life of their obedience and all their comforts do depend.

(1.) A presumption or groundless persuasion that they are already perfect. This some pretend unto in a proud and foolish conceit, destructive of the whole nature and duty of evangelical holiness or obedience. For this, on our parts, consists in our willing compliance with the work of grace gradually carried on unto the measure appointed unto us. If this be already attained, there is an end of all evangelical obedience, and men return again to the law unto their ruin. See Phil. iii. 12—14. It is an excellent description of the nature of our obedience which the apostle gives us in that place. All absolute perfection in this life is rejected as unattainable. The end proposed is blessedness and glory, with the eternal enjoyment of God, and the way whereby we press towards it which compriseth the whole of our obedience, is by continual uninterrupted following after, pressing, reaching out, a constant progress, in and by our utmost diligence.

(2.) A foolish supposition that being interested in a state of grace, we need not now be so solicitous about exact holiness and obedience in all things as we were formerly, whilst our minds hung in suspense about our condition. But so much as any one hath this apprehension or persuasion prevailing in him, or influencing of him, so much hath he cause deeply to question whether he have yet any thing of grace or holiness or no. For this ‘ persuasion is not of him who hath called us.’ There is not a more effectual engine in the hand of Satan either to keep us off from holiness, or to stifle it when it is attained, nor can any thoughts arise

in the hearts of men more opposite to the nature of grace : for which cause the apostle rejects it with detestation ; Rom. vi. 1, 2.

(3.) Weariness and despondencies arising from oppositions. Some find so much difficulty in, and opposition to the work of holiness and its progress, from the power of corruptions, temptations, and the occasions of life in this world, that they are ready to faint and give over this diligence in duties and contending against sin. But the Scripture doth so abound with encouragements unto this sort of persons, as that we need not to insist thereon.