

SEASONABLE TRUTHS IN EVIL TIMES.

SERMON I.

OF GRACE GROWING AND INCREASING.

“That as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.”—1 THESS. IV. 1.

THE apostle having exhorted the Thessalonians in the former part of this epistle to perseverance in grace, as you read in the former chapter, at verse 8, “For now we live if ye stand fast in the Lord;” and at verse 13 of the same chapter, “To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father:” he doth here, in this chapter, exhort them to christian progression, growing and increasing in grace. So in this first verse of chapter iv.

In this exhortation three things are considerable:

First, The matter which he exhorteth them unto in the latter end of the verse, that they would “abound more and more in the work of the Lord.”

Secondly, The manner of this exhortation, and that is with much earnestness; “We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you;” and, “We exhort you by the Lord Jesus.”

Thirdly, The reason or motive that he uses to press this exhortation: “That as ye have received of us, how ye ought to walk and to please God.” Ye cannot say that ye have not been taught, for both I and others have taught you, and “ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God.” Now, therefore, seeing that ye have received this of us, see that ye “abound more and more.”

“That ye abound more and more.” Beza and others, they have the words read thus: “So that ye excel more and more.” I will not dispute the translation. There is one great truth which the words at first view do hold forth unto you, and that is this:

It is the earnest desire of those that are faithful in the work of the ministry, and ought to be the care of all the saints themselves, to abound in the work of the Lord yet more and more.

We are not only to have grace, but to abound and grow. So he exhorts them in the 10th verse of the same chapter : " But we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more." The apostle is express in this exhortation : " But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." And in 2 Cor. vii. 1, " Having, therefore, these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

In the text it is called " abounding more and more." In verse 10 it is called " increasing more and more." By the apostle Peter it is called " growing in grace." By the apostle Paul it is called " perfecting of holiness." Now this you will find, if you look into Eph. iv., the end of Christ's ascension, and the end of all our ministry, of all our preaching and your hearing, that ye may abound in the work of the Lord more and more, and that ye may be made perfect. " He that descended, is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens : and he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers ; for the perfecting of the saints ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Then in verse 15, " But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ." So that you see this is to be our great care that do preach the word, and the endeavour of all those that hear it, that ye may abound in the work of the Lord yet more and more, that you may increase, that ye may grow in grace. And this you will find to be Paul's one thing, Phil. iii. 13 : " Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended ; but this one thing I do, (so you read it,) forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press towards the mark," &c. " This one thing I do," so you read it ; but the words " I do " are not in the Greek, but thus : " This one thing." " Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended ; but this is the one thing, forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things that are before." Our Lord and Saviour Christ, he had his one thing necessary ; and David had his one thing too, " One thing have I desired ;" and here now Paul, he hath his one thing, one thing for the saints, and that is this, We forget what is past, and press

on to that which is before ; labouring to increase and to grow in grace, and “ perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

And this you shall find to be the end of all those afflictions which we meet withal from God the Father. God the Father is unwilling to afflict his children, he would not do it unless it were necessary ; why the end of his affliction we find to be this, John xv. 2., “ Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away ; and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

And this you shall find to be the end of Christ’s coming, as you read in John x. 10. “ I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” There lies a poor soul, saith Christ, dead in trespasses and sins ; I am not only come to give life unto that soul, spiritual life, but that he may have it in more abundance. So that it is not only our duty to have grace, but we must “ abound therein more and more ;” we must grow therein. And, my beloved,

It is not only the duty of the saints to do so, but they will and they do do this. So saith David, “ I will praise thee yet more.” And if you look into Revelations ii., you shall find that this was the commendation of the church of Thyatira, at verse 19., that her works were “ more at the last than at the first.” Pray mind it ; it is a great and glorious commendation : oh, that it were the commendation of all the churches now being. With some it is contrary, their works are more at the first than at the last ; but saith he concerning the church of Thyatira, “ I know thy works and thy charity, and the last to be more than than the first.” Where there is a truth of grace, there will be a growth. Read I pray what is said in Prov. iv. 18., “ But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” “ That shineth more and more.” Look how it is with the light of the day, so with the grace of God in the hearts of his people ; the light is small and little at the beginning of the day, but it shineth more and more, it grows brighter and brighter unto perfect day : and so though grace in God’s people be but little at first dawning, yet that light and grace that is in them, it grows every day brighter and brighter unto perfect day.

Aye, but there is a great deal of danger, through the great opposition that the saints meet withal, that their light should be quite put out : they are in great danger to lose all, for

they meet with much opposition, yea and the rather, because that they do grow. But as the torch by being beaten burns the better: so the saints do by their oppositions, they grow stronger and stronger; as in Job xvii. "Upright men shall be astonied at this," &c.; "the righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." His opposition should make him grow more and more: when he is chidden from following Christ and the ordinances and the ways of Christ, he will cry so much the more, "Jesus thou son of David, have mercy upon me." And if you look into Acts ix., you shall find that Paul did increase by the opposition he met withal: when he was much opposed by the Jews, it is said, verse 22., "But Saul increased the more in strength, and confirmed the Jews." He increased the more.

God hath a hand upon all the hands of opposition against his children; and it is so far from putting out their light, that it makes their light to grow brighter and brighter.

In the next place, the saints do not only increase and abound more and more, but they can do no other, they cannot but grow in grace; for so the promise is, "To him that hath shall be given and he shall have it in more abundance." Now the godly they have grace, and therefore upon that account of the promise, they shall have it in more abundance. And so in that place of Isaiah, "He that waiteth upon the Lord shall renew his strength, he shall mount up as with eagles' wings:" there shall be an addition of strength unto him, he shall increase and abound yet more and more. In scripture phrase, grace it is called life: indeed it is our spiritual life. Now you find that all your sublunary lives, where they are there is growth: the plant or the tree it grows, because it hath life; and the beast grows, because he hath life. The sun, moon and stars, though they move apace, they do not grow; why? because they have no life: they have light, but no life, and so they grow not: but all the people of God they have a spiritual life, and so they will, and do and must, and cannot but grow. They make God himself their uttermost and their last end. What a man makes his last and his uttermost end, that he labours to grow up unto more and more; he never hath enough of it. Some men make riches their last and their uttermost end; and they never have enough. Some make God their end, and riches a means

to serve God; they can have enough: but when a man makes riches his last and his uttermost end, and never stints himself, he never thinks he hath enough. Now the children of God they make God himself their last and their uttermost end, his service and grace; and therefore they never have enough: they cannot have enough, but must labour to grow and increase and abound more and more.

And besides, they look upon grace, and growth and increase in grace, as their greatest excellencies. What a man looks upon as his excellency, that he doth much desire. Some place an excellency in fine gardens; and if they see a dainty flower in another's garden, they will never be at quiet till they have the like in their own garden, because therein they place an excellency. Now there are many increases in the world, wherein men place great excellency, and therein they labour to abound more and more. And now saith a godly creature, A rich man looks upon riches as his excellency, and therefore would yet have more; an honourable man looks upon credit as his excellency, and therefore he would have more; so do I look upon grace as my excellency, and therefore I must yet have more. A godly man having once tasted of the sweetness that is in the ways of God, Oh, saith he, it is so sweet, I must yet have more; give me more of this; though I die for it, yet give me more of this. He doth grow, and he cannot but grow and abound yet more and more.

Aye but you will say to me, Then am I afraid that I never had any truth of grace, because I do not find that I do grow in grace; where there is truth, there will be growth, and there will be increasing; but as for me, I do not find any such growth and increase, and therefore I fear that I never had grace at all.

For answer: As a man may have grace and not know it, so he may have grace and not perceive it; his earnest desire of having more and more still, makes him forget what he hath.

The more grace one hath, the more he doth see sin; and the more a man sees his sin, the more his own grace will be hidden from his own eyes. Godly men do oftentimes measure themselves by metaphors; as sometimes we that are preachers of the word, we fall upon a scripture metaphor,

as where Christ is called a *sun*, a *shield*, or *bread*; and we run the metaphor off its legs, further than the Holy Ghost did intend: so sometimes we do. So it is with christians too: they fall upon a scripture metaphor, and they run it and themselves off their legs, beyond what the Holy Ghost doth intend. For example, increase of grace in scripture phrase is called a growth: now because a christian cannot find his own spiritual increase answerable to all outward growth, therefore he thinks that he doth not increase in grace: whereas there is a great deal of difference between a spiritual increase, and an outward growth, in many things. As now, a man's body grows, but all the parts of his body do not grow out of his head; but now in our spiritual growth it is so, as you read in Col. ii. 19: "And not holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." Why here our spiritual increase in all the members comes from the head; it is not so in our outward growth; all the members of our body do not grow out of our head; but in our spiritual growth it is so. And so many other differences might be given. But now because that christians do not find their spiritual increase every way answerable to an outward growth, therefore they call all into question many times, and say, Oh, I do not grow in grace, and so I have no grace at all. Celestial bodies, as the sun, moon, and stars, they move apace, and may run hundreds of miles in an hour, yet when you look upon them, they seem to be fixt, and you see no motion; but look now upon your terrestrial bodies, men or beasts, moving before you, you see them move. So now, when a man looks upon his increase in riches, he may perceive that; but when you cast your eyes upon those celestial bodies, saints, you will think they are fixt, and they move not at all: and so you will think sometimes concerning yourselves, that you do not move at all, and yet move, and stir, and increase, and abound more and more. So that I say, first, As a man may have grace, and not know it; so it is possible for a man to increase in grace and not perceive it.

Oh, but I fear that I do not increase and abound more and more; for I do nothing now more for God than what I have done before, will some say. I pray now, and I did

pray before ; I hear the word, and I did hear before ; I read the Scripture in private, and I did read before ; I examine mine own heart, and I did so before ; I find no addition at all made to my spiritual condition ; what I did before, that I do now ; and therefore I fear that I am not grown in grace, and therefore that I never had any grace at all ; for where there is truth, there will be growth.

For answer to this, you must know that growth in grace doth not always consist in doing of other works for the kind, but in doing the same works over and over again better than before. As now, when one learns to write, when a man hath attained to a great perfection in writing, he doth not make other letters than he made at first ; he makes the same letters that he did, only he makes them better, and sets them closer. So now, in your growth and increase in grace, you must not think that you shall make other letters, or do other duties, but shall do the same duties now, and exercise the same grace now, as before ; only you will set your duties and graces closer together, and you will do the work better than you did before.

But again it may argue more grace, to do the same work afterwards. Pray consider this : I say, it may sometimes argue more grace to do the same work afterwards. As for example : suppose a person be an old man, or an old woman, when this person was young he prayed it may be an hour or two hours in a day ; now he is grown old, and his body is infirm and weak, to do the same thing now argues more grace now than before ; and therefore if you look into Psalm xcii., you shall find that this is made the growing of those that are old, that they shall bring forth fruit still : “The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree ; he shall grow like the cedar in Lebanon ;” he shall grow. “Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God.” Well, and what shall he do when he is old ? At verse 14 : “They shall bring forth fruit in old age.” He doth not say that they shall grow ; but this bringing forth fruit still in old age is his growth : so that sometimes it may argue more grace to do the same work afterwards than before.

Oh, but yet some will say, I am afraid that I do not grow in grace, and so indeed that I never had any truth of grace ;

for now I am much declined : at the first my heart it was mightily enlarged for God, and now it is straitened. Oh, what freedom once I had ! I remember a time when I went to prayer, and wept, and mourned, and my heart broke and melted ; but now my heart is exceeding cold, and very dead, and therefore I am even afraid that I am declined, and that I do not grow in grace, and so that I never had grace at all.

Give me leave to fix here a little, and to answer this objection, that I may speak a word of stay to those that are weary and troubled. And now as your objection arises, so shall my answer rise. Before, I said a man may grow in grace and not perceive it ; now I speak further, a man may grow and increase in grace, and yet think he is much declined ; a man may increase and yet think that he is much decreased. For, my beloved, sometimes, yea often, good people do measure themselves by that first affection which they had at their first turning to God ; and then the change was specific, and afterwards the change is gradual. When a man is first converted and turned to God, then he is turned from sin to God, from sin to grace, from the world to Christ : afterwards he doth not change from the world to Christ, but he changes from grace to grace, from glory to glory ; it is but a gradual change afterwards ; and therefore the change at the first being a specific thing, his affections were high then. At our first conversion and turning to God, all things are span-new ; and we are apt to be much affected with new things, and therefore the affections must needs be very much up and raised at the first, and when a man doth first convert and turn to God, and leave the world ; God the Father doth as it were take the poor soul into his arms when it is a babe, and he doth bestow many desires upon it ; and he gives out many encouragements, to weigh down those discouragements that the soul shall meet withal in parting with the world. But now afterwards, when a man is more able to go alone, possibly he doth not meet with these ; now shall a man think therefore that all is naught, and that he hath no grace at all, because he doth not feel what he had then ? Yet how often is this !

But besides, good people do mistake because of their ignorance, whereby they call that sin which is grace, and that grace which is sin. Thus I mean : it is a great sin for a man

to doubt of God's love, and to lie down upon his face, and to be discouraged, as if there were no hope for him in God: why many that are weak now, they look upon this as a great virtue, to doubt of their condition, and to call all into question: afterwards they are freed from these doubtings, and so they do grow in grace: but because they do look upon these doubtings as marks of virtue, they think because they have lost these, that now they are quite declined, whereas indeed they are grown in grace.

But in answer to this, you must know that our christian growth is fourfold.

1. There is a growth of affection.
2. Growth in extension.
3. Growth in regard of firmness and rootedness.
5. And growth in regard of spiritualness.

A man grows these four ways spiritually.

Sometimes his affection grows more intense hot than it was before: sometimes a man's growth is in regard of extension, his affections of love or joy extending to other objects than before. So in Hosea our growth is described to be a spreading of the branches. And sometimes a man grows when he is more firm and rooted in the way of God; and so our spiritual growth in that place of Hosea is described by our "taking root downward." And sometimes a man is said to grow when he is more spiritual. Beloved, weak christians look altogether at the intenseness of their affections; and if they do not find their affections so intense as they were before, then they break forth and say, Oh, now I am declined, and now I am decayed, and I have lost my first love; whereas there is a growth in regard of extension; as a man or beast he may attain to his full tallness, and after that he may batten and spread more: so in grace, a man's grace may spread more afterwards, and yet possibly be not so intense in regard of some affections, as it was at the first. Now a fountain or spring that hath but one stream, and afterwards that one stream be divided in many streams; if an unskilful man look upon it, he saith, How comes this to pass, that this fountain is dried up? here was a full stream before, and now there is not. But now, saith a skilful man that stands by him, now there are many streams, and so there is rather the more water, now it is divided into more streams. And so it is in re-

gard of grace ; at the first a man's grace doth run out much in one channel, afterwards it is divided into more streams, and it spreads more ; yet notwithstanding, those that are weak, because they do not find so full a stream in the same channel as before, though there be many streams now that there were not before, they question all, and they say they are abated, and they are declined, and they have lost their first love.

But again, whereas thou sayest it is not now with thee as it was before ; I say to thee, poor doubting heart, wherever thou art or standest, I say unto thee from the Lord, Thou hast more now than thou hadst before ; as thus : for suppose a child that heretofore served his father for wages, and doth now serve out of love, and not for wages, it may be he doth not do so much work as he did before, yet I say to you, If he doth but half so much out of love, he doth more than he did before when he wrought for wages ; now the work is more out of love to God : heretofore you were much grieved and troubled for sin committed, and you were therefore grieved, that your sin might be pardoned ; aye, but now you grieve for your sin because it is pardoned : I tell you, one tear from you of these gospel tears, is more than a bottle-full of all those legal tears that you had before, man or woman, and therefore there is no reason why thou shouldst be dejected, and say thus, I am declined, and I have lost my first love, and I do not grow in grace, and therefore I never had any truth of grace at all.

But you will say unto me then, If a man may grow and increase in grace, and yet think that he is decreased ; what certain signs are there, whereby a man may know that he doth grow in grace, and that he doth abound yet more and more ?

Beloved, I shall not give you any negative signs, but I shall make mention of some things, which if you have, and can find, you may certainly say, you are grown in grace. But mistake not, I do not say that if you do not find these, that therefore you should conclude that you are not grown. I come rather to comfort and to lift up the weary soul, than to trouble it : but, I say, if you find these, you are certainly grown in grace.

The great work of the gospel is to believe ; and if you can

rely more upon Christ in the time of your temptations than heretofore, surely you are grown in grace.

If you do find again a greater sweetness in the ways of God, than you have found heretofore, certainly you are grown: when we come and look upon a flower, we look at the colour of the flower, and the smell of the flower; but the bee doth not regard the colour of the flower, or the smell of the flower, but the bee regards the sweetness of the flower: so at our first coming into the ways of God, then we look at the colour, and how they appear; but afterwards, the more grace you have, the more sweetness you find; and if you find more sweetness, certainly you are grown more.

Again, If that you are more able to turn from the exercise of one grace to another, and of one duty unto another, than you were, this argues you are grown, if you be able to mingle graces together: a weak christian is all for one work, humiliation for sin committed, and it is true, we ought to be much humbled: I say, a weak christian is all for one work, but the stronger you grow, the more you will be able to mingle graces together, and to turn from one to another. As now, if one learn to sing, when one hath but little skill, possibly a man may sing one tune; but the more a man grows in skill, the more he will be able readily to turn from one tune to another. So in grace a man may be able to mingle graces more; and therefore our growth is so described, as you shall hear by and by in that of Peter, "Add unto your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge," &c.

Again, If you be able to go on in the ways of God more, without whip, or rod, or without spur, it argues you are grown more; give me leave to express it thus: a horse at the first, till he be acquainted with the road and way, he is ridden with a whip and with a spur; but afterwards when he is well used to the way, you may lay the bridle upon his head, and he need none of the spur and whip; why? because he is now used to the way: and so when christians come on at the first, then they are whipped on with more fear; but now when the reins seem to be laid upon the neck, they go the better and the faster: when they can go without that whipping and the rod, it argues that they are used more to the way of God than they were used before.

But further, the more a man is able to go out unto others

for counsel, spiritual admonition, consolation, or apprehension, the more he is grown, and he will grow in grace.

I will propound you a parable: suppose three men that are sick and weak; one is extremely ill, and the physician comes to his bed-side, and he spits in his physician's face, and will take nothing.

Another man he doth not deal so by the physician, he lies upon his bed, but he cannot stir off his bed; he lies upon his bed, and he hears the counsel of the physician, and he takes his advice.

A third man he is weak indeed, but he is able to go abroad, and he goes to the physician's house for his counsel and direction. I pray, which of all these three men are the most healthy? Surely, you will say, the latter is more healthy than the second, and the second than the first. Beloved, there are these three sorts of people, one that when the spiritual physic is brought to them, they spit in the physician's face, and they will have none. Others they are not so bad, but yet notwithstanding they keep their beds, as it were, and do not go forth for counsel.

But there is a third sort of sinners, that finding their souls ill at ease, they can go forth for counsel, and go out for admonition, and go out for reprehension. It may be that all these three conditions have past over some of you: you can remember the time when you did kick and fling, and spit in the physician's face, as it were, and you would none at all; afterwards you lay more still, but yet sate, and did not stir out: aye, but now you are able, God be thanked, to go out to the physician, or to such and such saints, and to open your condition before them; oh, thus it is with me, oh, thus it is with me, come, lay on some admonition, or lay on some healing plaster, some reprehension, some consolation; good sir, pity me; and the like. Now this argues more health than before.

Again, the more you are able to do the work of the Lord without noise, the more doth it argue that you are grown in grace. Beloved, Jesus Christ was a perfect workman, and did the work of the Lord perfectly, and he made no noise; it is said of him, that "he did not lift up his voice in the streets." Young christians make a great noise in the work of God. One, he cries out, Oh, I am damned, I am damned; and an-

other cries out after the same kind, Oh, I am damned, I am damned, and wring their hands in the family, and make a great noise when there is a work of God upon their hearts; like to your young scholars, when first of all they learn their books, they read with a great noise: afterwards, when they are grown men, and read better, they read silent, and make no noise. So now I say, thou man or woman, art thou able to do the work of the Lord in a more silent and sweet gospel way, than heretofore thou didst? this argues that thou art more grown than thou wert heretofore.

And further, if you know Christ more, you are grown more; the apostle puts them both together: "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ."

But take one more. If that you do as much as before, and deny your doing more than you did before, then you are grown in grace. One man doth much, and denies himself little; another doth much, and denies himself much: who hath most grace of these two? The husbandman will tell you, that when the ear of corn is not so ripe, it stands bolt upright; but when it is more ripe, then it hangs down its head, and looks to the earth: and so heretofore it may be you were much in prayer and in duty, you wept much; and it was well that you were much in duty and humiliation for sin; but, it may be, then you rested upon your duties, and denied yourself little. Aye, but now you are as much, but you have seen more of the free grace of God, and the love of God in Christ, and now you deny your duties more, and rest less upon them than you did; this is a growth now; and where these things are, you may conclude that you are grown. And I say to every soul here, Is there any one that doth find these things? thou art the man or woman that doth grow in grace, and doth increase; therefore, be of good comfort, thou art not declined, thou art not abated, thou hast truth of grace, thou hast growth of grace.

Aye, but whether I have or I have not, you will say, surely it is my duty to have; and what shall I do that I may grow in grace? I hope the Lord hath begun savingly upon my heart; but what shall I do that I may abound yet more and more, and increase in grace?

I must not be large here; give me leave to say some things to you.

First of all, observe what those ways of God are, unto which he hath promised increase; and oh, let your feet be found standing there; he hath promised to those that exercise; "To him that hath shall be given." It is opposed to laying up the talent in a napkin.

He hath promised increase to those that wait upon him: "Those that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

He hath promised increase to those whose feet stand in the courts of the house of the Lord, in Ps. xcii. 12: "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, and shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon: those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God." And so in Ps. lxxxiv. 4: "Blessed are they that dwell in thine house, they will be still praising thee." They that dwell in thine house they will be still praising thee.

But suppose that a man's feet do not stand in the court of the Lord's house, suppose a man be not planted in the house of the Lord, can he not grow in grace?

Yes: mark what follows in verse 5, 6, 7, all growth of grace is not installed upon one condition: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee." He had said before: "Blessed are those that dwell in thy house:" but suppose a man be driven out, and cannot dwell in God's house, shall he not be blessed, and shall he not grow? "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee, and in whose heart are the ways of them, who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools: they go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." They may grow too; but then it is upon these three conditions.

1. The ways of God must be in their hearts: "In whose heart are the ways of them."

2. They must look upon that condition as a "valley of Baca," a mourning valley, verse 6.

3. They must be abundant in private duty and exercise, digging up of pits; and then the rain falls, and fills those pits; and thus "they shall go from strength to strength." But the great increase is promised to those whose feet do stand in the court of the house of the Lord.

Again, would you know how you may grow in grace? Beloved, let your eye be stedfast upon the greater and higher

matters and objects of the gospel. The apostle for this end doth lay the great things of the gospel before the people, and prays for them, that they may be "filled with all the fulness of God." But, I pray, see what an expression he hath in 2 Cor. ix. 8: "And God (saith he) is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye always having all sufficiency in all things." All-sufficiency is a great attribute of God; they have it in a kind: "That ye always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." Mark what great things he lays here before them. And if you look into chapter vi. of the Epistle to the Hebrews, verse 6, you shall find that the apostle gives this plain direction that now I am upon for our growing in grace, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God: "Therefore (saith he) leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works," &c. Good people, mark: "Let us go on to perfection," how? "not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works." Some there are that are always laying the foundation, and all their life they are questioning whether their work were right at the first or no: Oh, I am afraid I was never truly humbled at the first. Their whole life is nothing but a laying of the foundation work; why saith the apostle, "Let us go on to perfection," &c. Be not always in this work of laying the foundation, if you would go on to perfection. And as for myself, saith he, I go this way to work, as you may read in chap. iii. of this Epistle to the Philippians: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing: forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press towards the mark." Mark, it is a similitude taken from those that run in a race; saith he, I do as those that run in a race; they stretch out their bodies towards the prize, so do I: and, saith he, as it is with those that run in a race, they do not go backward for to measure the ground that they have gone over, but they forget what is past, and press on to that which is before: so now do I, I forget that which is past, not only so as not to rest upon it, but I forget what is past, I am not always laying the foundation of the doctrine of repentance from dead works, but I press on to that which is before. And so, would you be

perfect and would you grow, let your eyes be upon those things that are before.

Again, if you would grow in grace, cut off all those superfluities that grow out of your heart, and give up yourselves wholly to the word of the Lord in this world. If you would have a tree grow, you slip off the lesser sprigs that grow out of the sides; they will hinder the growth, you will say. So saith the apostle: "Wherefore laying aside all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls." James i. 21.

But again, if you would grow in grace, and abound yet more and more; observe what gifts or graces God hath given you, and labour to improve them. Beloved, God doth give some gift or special grace to every christian, and that gift or grace is as a spade or shovel to dig out more out of the mines of Christ. Every bird hath its bill, and by the bill it doth take in its meat, whereby it grows; and every christian hath one gift or another whereby he doth excel; and with that gift or grace you should now go unto Jesus Christ, who is the great ordinance, and fetch out more. Observe, I say, what that gift and grace is, and labour to improve it more and more.

I will say no more in this; but if you would grow in grace, study much of the love of Jesus Christ: and you shall find that these two are put together by the apostle, in Ephes. iii. "For this cause (saith he) I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, &c. that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Mark how these go together: the more you see the love of Christ, the more you will love God; and the more you love him, the more you will obey him, and the more abundant you will be in the work of the Lord. Therefore as ye desire to grow, study the free love of God in Jesus Christ, and hereby you will be able to grow and to abound yet more and more. And that you

may do it, give me leave to speak here a little by way of encouragement hereunto, and so I will wind up all.

Beloved in the Lord when you hear of God's blessing any in scripture, he saith, "Increase and multiply." So then, the more you do increase in grace, the more your gifts and graces multiply, the more you do carry up and down with you a testimony of the Lord's blessing upon you.

Besides, herein you glorify God the Father; "Herein is my Father glorified, (saith Christ,) in that ye bring forth much fruit." It is the glory of the husbandman, that the tree bring forth much; it is the glory of God the Father that ye bring forth much, that ye abound more and more.

And the more and greater our opportunities are, and means of growth, the more are we all encouraged for to grow in grace. Let me appeal to you a little; have not your opportunities and means for growth been great here?

Communion of saints it is a great means for to grow in grace. Here you have time, here many saints meet together; and in poor country towns, possibly a poor christian may travel three or four miles before he can meet with one that may refresh his thoughts; here you have the opportunities which you have not in other places. Communion of saints, standing in the courts of the house of the Lord, is a great means for to grow in grace.

Preaching of the gospel, and the word of God's grace, is a special and great means of growth: it is called the rain of plenty, or the plentiful rain. It is a true speech: It is the year, and not the soil, that doth make the fruit; if the rain falls seasonably, and the sun shines seasonably, then you have fruit. Now beloved, I appeal to you; have you not had a fine time of it here? Have you not had a sweet season of gospel preaching amongst you? The Lord knows what plentiful rain hath fallen upon you. Oh, great engagements are upon you all for to grow in grace; and if you, this people, shall not after all your engagements this way, and opportunities to grow; if you shall not grow in grace, oh how will you appear before God your Father at the great day, how, how will you give an account of those talents that you have had? We read of him that had but one talent, he wrapt it up in a napkin; but the parable speaks there were five left, and two left; but it is not said that he that had the five,

or the two, wrapt them up in a napkin ; but he that had but the one talent, he wrapt it up, and you know what became of him ; but now when those that had five talents shall wrap them up in a napkin, oh what will become of them. Beloved, you have not had the one talent, you have not had the two talents ; you have had the five talents : and if there was such a miserable end of him that wrapt up his one talent, oh what will become of us that have five talents, and wrap them up, and do not improve them. You know what the Lord Christ said to the church of Ephesus ; how he threatened that church : “ I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast lost thy first love : remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place.” God knows whether your first love be not left or no ; I am sure the Lord hath taken away a burning and a shining light from among you ; and certainly, if you do not grow and thrive under all those opportunities of grace, and growth in grace that you have had, and still have ; how soon the Lord may quite remove his candlestick from you, and leave you quite in the dark, he only knows. Wherefore, beloved in the Lord, you have received much, oh much is expected from you, much is expected from you. And let me tell you for your encouragement, if you do grow in grace, and abound in the work of the Lord, then shall there be “ an abundant entrance given unto you into the everlasting inheritance.”

And so I come to that place of Peter, which I shall but open before you, and so have done for this time ; and, I pray, consider it diligently. 2 Peter i. 5 : “ And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge.” But mark how he prefaces before he comes to the words : “ Whereby (saith he) are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lusts.” Now besides this, there is something else to be done ; well, what is that ? it is such a matter as all diligence is to be given to it : “ Besides this, giving all diligence, add unto your faith virtue.” It is not, it is not enough that you believe, but you must have moral virtue also : “ Add unto your faith virtue.” Aye, but sup-

pose we have a moral virtue, is not that enough? No: "and to your virtue knowledge." You must not only have moral virtues, but you must *know* Jesus Christ. But suppose he hath knowledge, is not that yet enough? No: "and to your knowledge add temperance," whereby you may be kept from the immoderate use of the things of this world. But suppose we have that, is not that enough? No: "add to your temperance patience:" you shall meet with many afflictions and crosses, and therefore you must have patience. But suppose we have patience, is not that yet enough? No: "and to your patience add godliness;" there must be a right worshipping of God in his service. Well, but suppose we have godliness, and do worship God after a right manner, is not that enough? No: "add to your godliness brotherly kindness;" you that are saints are brethren, and therefore it is not enough that ye have the worshipping of God in a right way, but ye must agree together as brethren; add to your right worship and godliness brotherly kindness. But suppose we have that, is not that enough? No: "add charity;" brotherly kindness may be towards you that are brethren, but there must be charity towards all, to those that are not of the body. Well, but suppose we do these things, what then? Read verse 8: "For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." You complain that your hearts are barren, and that you lie as barren ground in the family; why if you would not be barren and unfruitful, you must grow and add one grace unto another: "And if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful." Well, but suppose a man lack these things? Read verse 9: "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off;" he may see some things in religion that are near, but those things that are afar off he is blind in them, "and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins," that is by baptism. But suppose we do all this, what then? Pray see what encouragement there is to this in verse 10: "Wherefore the rather brethren give diligence to make your calling and election sure;" this will be a sign to you of your election. "And if you do these things you shall never fall." Whereas those that are weak, and do not grow in grace, they

stumble at all occasions ; “ but if ye do these things ye shall never fall,” and not stumble as those that are weak do. And yet further, at verse 11, you shall not only have this benefit for the present but for the future : for so “ an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Do you abound in grace, and grow in grace, and are rich in grace ? Why look as you abound, so there shall be an abundant entrance ministered to you into the everlasting kingdom. “ Wherefore (he saith) I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things.” It may be you will tell me you knew these things before ; but mark verse 12 : “ I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.” Yea, at verse 13 : “ I think it meet as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance.” And that you may see that it is a matter of great concernment, he doth not only say that he would put them in remembrance as long as he lived, but he would take some course when he was dead that this exhortation should be pressed upon them, verse 15 : “ Moreover, I will endeavour that you may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.” Oh, therefore what a necessity is there that we should grow in grace. Wherefore, brethren and beloved in the Lord, as you have been exhorted not only by me at this time, but by others of God’s servants ; so now labour to abound in all well pleasing, to abound yet more and more. And for me I shall say to you and concerning you, as the apostle in Phil. i. : “ This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that ye may approve things that are excellent : that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”