

# CHAPTER 7: OF A BELIEVER'S GROWTH IN GRACE. BY JOHN BRINE

BY grace I do not intend a speculative knowledge of the doctrines of Christianity. That an acquaintance with the truth, connection, and harmony of Christian principles is not grace, sufficiently appears I think, from what has been before observed.

Nor gifts grace; neither an ability to explain, defend, and inculcate those doctrines, though it be in ever so serviceable a manner. A man may be furnished with eminent gifts, and greatly improve them by reading, meditation, and a diligent exercise of those talents, and at the same time dwindle in his graces. And he certainly will so do, if he aims not at the exercise of his graces in the exercise of his gifts. When it is thus with any who are employed in public work, however accurate their performances may be, a spiritual savour will always be found wanting in them. It is as necessary for a minister to look well to his graces as to his gifts, if he desires and designs an improvement in both. I fear that with many there is great neglect in this matter, if the best are not culpable of too much negligence herein.

As the Apostle Paul was very eminent in grace and holiness, so it was his earnest desire, that churches and particular persons to whom he directed his Epistles, might increase and greatly flourish therein. And in my opinion, we may easily learn wherein that growth of grace consists, by attending unto his solemn prayers to God in behalf those to whom he writes; and by consulting the accounts which he gives us of his own gracious experience, relating unto this momentous subject.

1. Let us attend unto the consideration of what was the subject matter of his request unto God for others. Hereby our views will be much enlarged on this noble subject; and if there is anything of spirituality in our minds, we shall, under the blessing of God, be stirred up to make his petitions for others, our requests unto God for

ourselves. He prays for the enlargement of the saints' knowledge of heavenly mysteries. This favor he earnestly desires might be vouchsafed unto the Ephesians, Philippians, and to the Colossians. It is evident that he intends the most sublime and deep mysteries of the gospel. Doctrines which many through ignorance, pride, or it may be as to some, a contempt of them, would have them buried in eternal silence and oblivion; or if not so, will scarcely allow of an explicit mention of them in public; because, as they say, "they are of so abstruse, difficult, and perplexed a nature, that they are above the reach of vulgar and ordinary capacities;" and therefore not likely to be of any very great use to the interest of holiness and practical religion, which it must be the real and principal design of the Christian revelation to promote. And the dreadful effects of this blasphemous pretence against God and His sacred truths, under which the church at this time groans, and in many places withers and declines, in savour, spirituality, and experimental religion, are far more than I am capable of enumerating. The meanest Christian is able to conceive of the sublimest principles that are peculiar to the gospel, in that manner the apostle desired the dear saints to whom his epistles were inscribed, might understand them: that is to say, in a spiritual manner. Strong reason is not necessary to this, though strong grace is needful to a fixed and steady persuasion of them after a spiritual sort. The knowledge of technical terms, the use of which has become necessary in treating on those subjects, through learned men's subtle and quaint distinctions upon them, not out of love to the truth, but with a desire to curtail, corrupt, or entirely sink it, is not required to a spiritual understanding of them. Philosophy and logic are useless things in this matter. Neither are they of that advantage, even when soberly used, in the handling of evangelical doctrines, as some suggest they are. They cannot contribute anything towards the discovery of those truths. The reason is plain, they are no other than an artificial ordering of our conceptions concerning some natural truths, and inferring others from them, which naturally follow from thence. And what can that do towards the discovery of supernatural truths, or of the nature of those truths?

Nothing at all. Persons who (in comparison with others) may be accounted babes in the knowledge of earthly things, may have a clear and distinct understanding of the nature of the mysteries of Christianity, though they cannot discourse of them in that artificial way, which some with great readiness may do, who are us ignorant of the things themselves, whereof they speak, as a stock or a stone. God knows that human science is a poor foundation for human pride. Philosophy, even in her own sphere, is not so knowing in many instances, as her votaries represent her. She often puts us off, with ingenious conjectures only, though she vaunts, as if she gave us the most undeniable demonstration, and we are so foolish as to grow up into confidence without proof. It is enough for her to act this part. in natural things, let us never permit her to impose upon us in spirituals also.

This observation dropt from me before I was well aware, but since it has fallen from my pen, I shall not retract it, for I know it is truth, however mortifying it is to our boasted intellectual powers, which I could give proof of in various instances.

2. They are common Christians, for whose improvement in the knowledge of the mysteries of divine grace, the apostle prays; not such whose talents were above the ordinary degree. The evidence afforded in favor of their truth, is obvious in itself, and not beyond the reach of a common understanding, though it is much obscured by the studied distinctions, philosophical objections, and critical wresting's of many learned men. And as to the nature of those mysterious doctrines, reason merely, can never understand it. This I think may be received, as a certain rule in divinity, viz., that those principles, which as to their truth are above the discovery of reason, the natural understanding of men, how much soever it is improved, can never attain unto an acquaintance with their true nature. That is a supernatural gift. And the meanest capacity is as susceptible of this heavenly grace as the most capacious mind. And, therefore, the profoundest doctrines of Christianity may be profitably understood by persons of very small discernment and abilities in other things, as they are proposed to the faith of the saints in the Holy Scriptures,

for their encouragement and consolation. This holds true even with respect to the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, predestination, satisfaction, and efficacious grace. Though they cannot dispute about essence and person, priority or posteriority, nor concerning subsistence in itself, or in another; nor of the divine decrees, in consistence with human liberty; nor of the foundation on which God proceeded in the business of satisfaction; nor of the certain efficacy of divine grace in the conversion of a poor sinner, in an agreement with the free agency of the subject of that effectual influence. I say, though they cannot debate those points with subtle objectors, they are capable of understanding these precious truths, in such sort as they are revealed of God, with a gracious view to excite in their minds a holy adoration of Himself, and of His designs in their favor; and to engage them to exert acts of faith, hope, and joy in a glorious Redeemer, wherein alone consists that knowledge which will stand our souls in stead, in a time of trial, temptation, and more especially at the awful hour of death.

3. The apostle entreats that the knowledge of the Ephesians might be increased in the great things of God, viz.,

His relation unto Christ, as mediator, and unto His people in and through Him. This is implied in that character under which he speaks of God, in his solemn address to Him, “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And, that they might clearly view Him, as the Fountain and Author of blessedness and glory, signified by the other branch of His character, “the Father of glory.” He communicates grace, which is a meetness for future glory; it is the first-fruits of it, and is of a glorious nature, and is called glory. An advance in grace is a transformation of the mind into the heavenly image, from glory to glory. The titles he gives to the blessed Spirit are very instructive, and suited unto the matter of his following petitions: “The Spirit of wisdom and revelation.” He perfectly knows all the deep things of God, wherein His wisdom is in the fullest manner discovered, and is able to make us know them to our peace, consolation, and spiritual joy. Now follow his requests unto God for them, that their minds might be furnished with larger degrees of heavenly light: “The eyes

of your understanding being enlightened,” whereby they would clearly discern what was “the hope of their calling.” Vocation intends that holy calling, which is the fruit of God's purpose and grace, given us in Christ before the world began. The hope of it may respect either the object and foundation of the saints' spiritual expectations, or the good which grace in the soul is a hope of enjoying hereafter, which is expressed by “riches of glory,” attributed to the heavenly inheritance. Somewhat of that glory we receive in this state; but the riches, plenitude, and perfection of it, are reserved for our enjoyment in the future state. Again, he desires that they might know what grace and power were displayed and exerted in that good work wrought in them, as the only preparative for a participation of that glorious state. His desire was that they might have a more enlarged apprehension of the cause of their vivification, when they were in a state of death in sin. Which cause is the infinite power of God. “The greatness of His power, yea, the exceeding greatness of His power, and the working of His mighty power, the same as He exerted in raising Christ from the dead.” Some learned men, in order to evade the force of an argument taken from hence, in confirmation of the doctrine of the efficacious grace of God, in the conversion of a poor sinner, observe, that it was the manner of the eastern writers to use strong language and bold figures; and that, therefore, some abatement of the force of their expressions may be made, consistently enough with the true intention of those authors. When criticism fails, this shift is to serve their turn. And no question but they compliment themselves very highly, on account of this invented evasion, by the help of which, they may sink the pompous language of a divine writer to as low a sense as they would have had him expressed, if they had dictated to him on those subjects. We see that other people, besides the Papists, know how to make the Scriptures a nose of wax. What if some others should act the same part? And why may they not, on what is said relating to the subject of future blessedness in this place and elsewhere; and maintain, that though lofty and grand expressions are used on that subject, yet no such grand and noble ideas are intended

to be conveyed by those exalted modes of speech, as we imagine; and insist upon it that the future state of the saints is not such in grandeur, majesty, bliss, and glory, as those rising expressions in loftiness naturally lead us to conclude upon. What must we say to them? Surely this, — except we will content ourselves with low apprehensions of that blessed state, and lay aside our hopes of being hereafter so happy as we desire to be, — that they are bold corrupters of the Word of God, though they boast of superior learning and ingenuity, in interpreting it. Without the leave of these men, we shall still believe that when we read of God's inheritance in the saints, and of glory, and of God's glory, and of the riches of that divine glory, in relation to that inheritance, such blessedness is designed, as far transcends our present most exalted ideas of it. And when we read of God's power, of the greatness of His power, of the exceeding greatness of His power, and of the working of His mighty power, in effecting a saving change in our souls, we shall still retain a persuasion, (whether these men will allow us or no) of two things.

(1.) That this change requires the exertion of the infinite power of God to produce it.

(2.) That almighty power is certainly effectual in its influence on the hearts of sinners, and really converts them from sin to God. And since the knowledge of this, and the increase of it, among other things, were the matter of the apostle's request to God for the Ephesians, we are firmly persuaded that the belief of it is a necessary article of faith, and that it is what may be apprehended in a very useful manner by common Christians, and that a growth in grace necessarily supposes an increasing acquaintance with this, and the other things above mentioned. Let some call them speculative points of doctrine, which have little or no influence upon practice. It is true, indeed, they have no influence at all upon the minds and the behaviour of many; but that is because they are strangers to Christianity, both in its principles and that holy conversation, which it recommends. Farther, the apostle prays that God, “according to the riches of His glory,” or of His grace, which is His glory, and he designs and desires that they might so account it, would strengthen

them, “with might by His Spirit in their inner man.” The inner man only is the subject of a divine influence, and capable of receiving spiritual strength; the flesh, or old man, is not so; and it betrays great ignorance, both of grace and of the flesh too, to imagine that it can. Increase in grace consists much in the communication of an additional vigour to our spiritual part, whereby it exerts itself in a lively manner. Farther, he beseeches God that “Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith,” i.e., that they might be much conversant with Him in a way of believing, or in acting faith on Him, in his person, offices, work, and benefits; in the merit of His obedience, and of His sacrifice, and in the fullness of His grace, and the prevalence of His intercession, that “being rooted and grounded in love,” in a sense of a dear Saviour's love to them, in their love to Him, and to one another, they might be equal to any of the saints, in a perception of the love of Christ; or in an acquaintance with that love in its dimensions, the “breadth, length, depth, and height” of it, know and be persuaded of it, as an affection which surpasses our most extensive ideas, and that they might “be filled with all the fullness of God.” Upon the whole, I think two things may fairly be inferred, from what is expressed by the apostle in a way of petition. First. That grace is a spiritual understanding of spiritual things, or heavenly mysteries. Secondly. That the increase of grace necessarily supposes the advancement of that knowledge.

And the apostle prayed that the Philippians might “abound in love” more and more, “in knowledge, and in all judgment.” Christian love is not a blind affection or passion; it is a spiritually discerning grace. And those things that are the objects on which the grace of love is acted, are discerned in some measure in their nature, in order to a spiritual delight in them. Hence it follows, that where there is not a spiritual understanding of spiritual things, there is no spiritual pleasure in them; and also that we are deceived if we think that we increase in love to heavenly objects, without a growing acquaintance with their excellency and glory. An advancement in divine love, cannot be without an improvement in heavenly knowledge. The more a Christian knows of the importance and glory

of evangelical truths, the more will his heart be attracted after them, and the infinitely glorious objects to which they relate, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And therefore it is a folly greatly to be lamented, that men propose to raise and maintain in the minds of those to whom they minister, a holy affection, without endeavoring to furnish them with an understanding of the holy mysteries of the Christian religion. For no object is loved, farther than it is apprehended and known. Love to God springs from the knowledge of Him, in the designs and acting's of His grace, and the benefits accruing to our souls from thence.

In the doctrines of Christianity, two things are to be observed.

1. Their truth.
2. Their nature.

A man may discern the former, who hath no perception of the latter. In the latter, an apprehension of the former is necessarily included; for the nature of evangelical truths cannot be known without the mind hath received a conviction of their verity; and consequently, the flourishing of the grace of love, supposes a growing acquaintance both with the truth and nature of these doctrines. But it may be needful to observe, by way of caution, that love only arises from a spiritual perception of the nature of those sublime truths; a bare conviction of their truth, however full it is, by an attentive consideration of the clear evidences given in favor thereof, will never beget any delight in the things themselves, for they are still unknown. Let none, therefore, content themselves with a discernment and persuasion of their truth, nor imagine that they are Christians because they have a knowledge of the truth of those principles; for men may eternally perish under the just condemnation of the law, who yield the firmest assent unto the truth of the gospel. Real grace is a spiritual understanding of spiritual things, and the soul's adherence unto them, and holy delight in them, as they are glorious, and exalt the glory of God in His persons and infinite perfections.

The Colossians were also interested in the prayers of the apostle; and for them he entreated of God an enlargement of their heavenly

knowledge, or an increasing acquaintance with the will of God, i.e., His counsels and purposes of grace, concerning their salvation in its several parts, and in the infinitely wise methods wherein it is accomplished; which contrivance is the fullest, brightest, and most astonishing display of the wisdom of God. His wisdom shines in all His works; but in the affair of our redemption by Christ, there is such an exercise of mercy and grace towards sinners; and such a manifestation of divine wrath and indignation against sin; as will forever fill the minds of men and angels with astonishment and delight. In this business the greatest evil is overruled by sovereign love, for bringing into view and everlasting enjoyment the highest good, viz., the treasures of God's kindness, grace and mercy; which otherwise had lain eternally hid and concealed. And it is especially to be observed, that it is a spiritual understanding of that so deep and sublime a mystery that the apostle intends, and that is the matter of his request to God on their behalf. That it is an acquaintance with the real and true nature of the doctrines of Christianity, not merely a perception of their truth, which never produces those effects that he ardently wished might plentifully be found with them. Farther, that he designs an increase in the knowledge of the profound truths of the Christian revelation, will not, I think, admit of the least scruple, if we take into consideration that his desire was, that they might be replenished with the knowledge of "the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ," where is clearly proposed to their serious consideration, and consequently to their faith, what many nominal Christians pretend can be no article of the belief of common and ordinary saints, viz., the doctrine of the Trinity, or of the real distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit, their equality and their union. And that glorious mystery which these Three, alike eternal, wise, powerful, and good, were concerned in the contrivance of, even the salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ. And it is worthy of notice that if there is anything in that scheme which deserves the name of mystery above other parts of it, the apostle desired that they might receive the largest and richest assurance of its truth, and that they might profess and own it as an article of their creed. Nor did the

inspired writer, under the dictates of the Holy Spirit, pray for what is in its nature impossible. True it is, let learned men take it as they please, common Christians are full as capable of understanding the great things of God, as any of those who have the best title to that character.

And as Christ is the sum and substance of evangelical truth, or as all those truths meet in Him, their proper center, a growth in heavenly knowledge is an increase of our acquaintance with Him, in the constitution of His person, offices, work, fullness, and benefits. Hence the apostle exhorts us to “walk in Him, as we have received Him,” which intends the renewal of acts of faith upon Him, as He “of God, is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” Nor is there any increase in grace and holiness, without renewed acts of faith on Him, for it is only by believing views of His glory, that we are changed into the heavenly image, from glory to glory.

II. If we attend unto the consideration of the apostle's gracious experience as he relates it, in respect to this point, we shall see the truth of what is observed above, fully exemplified in him. He declares, that he lived a life of faith on Christ, in His love, the acts of His love, its nature, and the precious effects of it. And by a discernment of his excellency, beauty, and glory, ardent love to Him, delight in Him, and earnest desires of a clearer knowledge of Him, and of greater conformity unto Him, were produced in his soul.

1. He set no value on all his accomplishments and excellencies, which he had esteemed gain. The discovery he received of the glory of Christ, the Sun of righteousness, obscured and hid all the shine of his own glittering righteousness, which before was exceedingly pleasing to him, and in the light whereof he had walked with great delight. He now saw that he had been involved in darkness, that caused him to be content in encompassing himself about with sparks, and walking in the light of his own fire; and that it was rich grace undeceived him, and prevented his lying down in eternal sorrow; which is the case of all those who are left to this dependence on their own services, however exact and shining they may be in

their apprehension, for they are no other than an ignis fatuus, which will lead men into everlasting perdition.

2. He accounted all things, i.e., his extraordinary gifts, and their exercise for the benefit of the church, his grace, and the acting's of it in all duties he discharged both as a Christian and a minister, but “loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.” The phrase is very observable, he doth not say for Christ, but for the knowledge of Christ. Such a value he put upon an acquaintance with Him, in His glory, in the glory of His person, righteousness and grace, as caused him to look upon all other things as comparatively nothing. And he freely, cheerfully suffered the loss of them all, and esteemed them but dung, dog's meat, (as the Greek word signifies) for Christ.

3. In this low estimate of all these excellencies, he had respect to the righteousness of Christ for justification before God; and therefore, he casts no slight or contempt on grace and the fruits of it in itself, but rejects it in the business of his acceptation with God, for the righteousness of Christ, which is infinitely glorious and valuable, and hath infinite merit in it arising from the infinite dignity of His person, who is as truly God, as He is really man.

4. He expresses an intense desire to know Him, that is to say, to grow in the knowledge of His person, who is incomparably excellent and beautiful, and admits of no compare with the loveliest among angels or saints. His glory is like that of the sun, theirs but like that of the planets, which is borrowed, and inexpressibly inferior to that of those lucid bodies from which they derive it all. Every excellency centers in Him, and therefore, He deservedly is the object of the love, joy, adoration and delight of the happy saints and angels who encircle His throne in heaven. He is all beauty without blemish, all radiant glory, without so much as the least shade, or a feeble ray. As God, He is possessed of all infinite perfections. As man, He is the subject of purity untainted, and adorned with all the shining graces of the Holy Spirit in their plenitude and perfection. As God and man united, He is the most glorious effect of the immense wisdom of God; which constitution of His person was designed to answer ends

respecting God and the church, which could not in any other way be effected.

Ends most interesting to the glory of all the divine perfections, and unto our peace, joy, and everlasting felicity. And, consequently, a spiritual view of His person, will kindle in our hearts fervent love to Him, beget a holy delight in him, encourage us to exercise a holy trust in Him, and influence us to make the adoring song of the blessed angels who were the joyful messengers of His nativity, our own, and with pleasing accents cause us to pronounce their language on that most happy occasion: — “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good-will towards men.” If we attentively consider the grace, mercy, kindness, and wisdom discovered in the constitution of His person, we shall be at a loss to determine which most calls for our wonder, praise, and holy admiration. Again, the knowledge of the different states of our gracious Redeemer, must certainly strike us with amazement, and possess our souls with ravishing pleasure. Can we view this glorious person in the depth of poverty, laden with calumny and reproach, delivered up to suffering and death, yea, to an ignominious, painful, and accursed death, and that for our sins, and in order to our eternal redemption from misery, which we so justly deserved, without astonishment at the grace of God, and without shame, sorrow for, and indignation against sin and ourselves? Our hearts must be stone, if this prospect affects them not. On the other hand, can we see Him crowned with glory, and not feel the pleasing passions of love, delight, and joy arise in our breasts? It can never be.

5. The apostle earnestly desired a farther acquaintance with the power of His resurrection. That hath an influence into our justification, as it is an evident demonstration of the reality and completeness of His satisfaction; is God's act of acquitting Him of our sins, and is His discharge of us from guilt, in Him, as members whom he represented. He was “raised again for our justification.” A surety's discharge from his obligation upon payment made, necessarily infers the right to a discharge of the principal, whose surety he is. Again, the resurrection of Christ hath a powerful

influence into our spiritual life, both in the principle and growth of it. One happy consequence of the Head's rising again, is, the members partaking of a divine life from Him. We are begotten again by virtue of His resurrection. Once more, our resurrection to a state of blessedness, is a fruit of His vivification who died for our sins. This is a point largely insisted on by our apostle, in the fifteenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians: — “Because Christ lives, we shall live also.” These are very momentous truths, and if faith is in a lively manner exercised upon them, our souls will be filled with solid peace, and holy triumph over all our enemies, and we shall set very light by all the things of this world, our minds and affections will be raised to things that are above, where our risen Lord is.

6. Grace is conversant about the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. His sufferings were great and of a penal nature, in our stead, and for our redemption. We therefore, have fellowship with Him therein. He suffered as our Surety and Head, and we as debtors and members, were therein concerned. Hence, whatever benefits and advantages arise from His sufferings, they relate to us, and were intended for us: this, the very nature of the thing, and the grounds of that amazing transaction, abundantly testify. And how great and glorious are those blessings which spring from his agony and death! Pardon of sin, of all sin to those whose guilt He bore; peace and reconciliation with God; security from divine vengeance; victory over sin, death and hell. Since such eminent fruits arise from the sufferings of Christ, and since there is so much of the wisdom, grace, mercy, sovereignty, righteousness, and justice of God, discovered in that affair; and since faith discerns these things therein, what joy! what consolation! what adoration! must the prospect of them produce, and maintain in the souls of believers! And an intense desire to increase in the knowledge of those things, is a good evidence of a growth in grace. On the contrary, if we are content with a low degree of understanding in these important truths, and we are but little conversant with them, grace is under a decline: for these

things are our food, our life, our all, as we are Christians or spiritual persons.

7. The apostle longed vehemently for a conformity to the death of Christ. By virtue of His death, His members are dead to the law, sin, and to the world. His death is the condemnation and death of sin, which is the procuring cause of death, curse, and wrath: and as faith views this, the saints die unto sin and live unto God, and serve Him on other grounds and considerations than what the law proposes, in a cheerful, spiritual, and heavenly manner, without legal terrors, which never produce an obedience that is acceptable to God. And they die to the world. That is to them as a dead carcass, wholly unfit for their entertainment and delight, even in the very best things it has to boast of. Its riches are not valued, its pleasures are despised, all its honors are trampled on as low and mean trifles, when faith is much exercised on a crucified Saviour. Hence, says the apostle “by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” The men of the world have no pleasure in grace, and grace hath no delight in the world; it considers all its delectable things not only as trifles, but as dead and lifeless objects, which have nothing amiable and attractive in them. A man would as soon embrace and hug in his bosom a stinking carcass, as grace choose and delight in the perishing vanities of this polluted world. If it hath not better and infinitely more glorious objects to converse with and exert itself upon, it will retire and remain inactive. And we may be certain of the truth of this, that grace is not exercised even if it is as a principle, in the minds of those who are immersed in worldly cares, carnal pleasures, and the empty titles this world can bestow on men. Oh! how many professors give sad evidence of a carnal mind, by a pursuit after, fondness for, and delight in things which the name they bear obliges them to consider as dead, putrid, and rotten! How far are they from desiring a conformity to the death of Christ, who are for living in pleasure, and are never easy but when they are amusing themselves with one vanity or another, none of which afford them satisfaction; and therefore, they endeavor to supply their emptiness by their great variety, and run round in an amazing circle of

unsatisfying newly-invented delights, to the loss of all their spiritual peace, joy, and it may be, unto the eternal ruin of their precious souls hereafter. And hence we may see, that it is a vain thing to hope for an increase in holiness and spirituality, without a growing acquaintance with Christ, in His person, the power of His resurrection, and in the fellowship of His sufferings; for conformity to His death is unattainable in any other way.

8. The apostle expresses the extent of his desire, which was of a vast compass, for it reached unto the summit of that glory God intends to bestow upon His people, at the resurrection of their bodies from the dead. This he longed after, kept in view, and joyfully expected, “waiting for the adoption,” or that blessedness and glory which belong unto the children of God, who are heirs of Him and joint heirs with Christ; and this he explains by the redemption of the body, in that place. And elsewhere, he declares the same earnest longing for this happy state, wherein “mortality shall be swallowed up of life.” This was his aim, and the bent of his desire: — “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” His proficiency in heavenly knowledge, grace, and holiness was very great; but far short of what he aimed at: — “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect;” that is to say, I am so far from having arrived to that glory, that I am not yet perfect, or furnished with that knowledge, purity, and love, which the souls of departed saints are the subjects of. And therefore, he desired to depart and be with Christ, which is far better than the present state, but inferior in glory to that which will commence immediately upon the resurrection, when the saints will be rendered immortal, spiritual, and glorious in their mortal part; their glorified bodies be reunited to their perfect minds; and made capable of steadily looking upon Christ their Head in all His glory at the right hand of God, whose face shines as the sun in its full strength; when all the elect will be presented to the Father, in those heights of glory His everlasting love appointed them to the enjoyment of, as sons and heirs of Himself; when a complete victory over all their enemies, sin, Satan, death and hell, shall be enjoyed by them all. And when

the divine Father will most clearly appear to be all in all. ALL to Christ as the Mediator and Head of the elect body, “the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven;” and ALL in every member of that body. And therefore, Head and Members will eternally unite in songs of praise, joy, and adoration for his gracious, sovereign, and infinitely wise purposes concerning them. Christ the Head will lead in ascriptions of glory to the Father, for the designs he formed about Him and His members in his eternal mind; and they will joyfully catch His adoring language, and express their gratitude for His redeeming love in the lofty strains of praise they will learn of Him in the world above. And the holy angels who encircle the church, placed near the throne of their exalted Head, with holy affection, delight, and wonder, will gaze upon the superior glory of the bride, the Lamb's wife; as the result of sovereign goodness and immense wisdom, which will engage them all to ascribe salvation, glory, and power to God, and unto Him that sits on the throne forever and ever. This glorious state was ardently desired by the apostle, and he had it in prospect; and he followed after, or endeavored to obtain the knowledge of this state. “If that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” Calling is unto God's eternal glory, and it is a disposition to converse in a way of believing, with those objects which will always be viewed in that blissful state. He did not reckon himself to have apprehended; his knowledge, though very extensive, was not complete: but one thing above all others he did, “forgetting the things that were behind,” i.e., the world, on which he had turned his back, with an intention never more to afford it a smiling look in its most pleasing dress and forms; and as to the things he had already learned of a spiritual nature, he would not dwell on them, but as a person in a race, (to which he alludes) looks not back on the ground he has run over, but continues his course without stay or abatement of his pace, that he may win the prize for which he runs; so would he pursue his end in view; “reaching forth towards the things that are before.” Glorious and precious things he had enjoyed views of by faith; but not content with those prospects, his desires were intensely carried forth after new glories, which he

knew would open to his clear, uninterrupted, and endless view in the better world, where he vehemently longed to be. "I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Effectual vocation is a high calling indeed: it is glorious in all its causes, viz., the impulsive, the rich grace and mercy of God; the procuring, the blood of Christ; the efficient, is the good Spirit of God. Its final cause, that God may be honored and glorified by us. He forms us for Himself, that we may show forth His praise. And it is with a view to our enjoyment of God; for we are begotten again to an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for us. And the nature of it is spiritual and glorious; its effects are all excellent and holy. It is the calling of God, and that as in Christ Jesus, — as a new covenant God and Father in and through Him, to all those who are the happy subjects of this vocation. The prize is eternal glory and blessedness. The mark we must reach if we receive the prize, is Christ in His person, offices, work and benefits. For those who have not the Son have not the life of grace, nor shall possess the life of glory. The holy apostle pressed towards Christ, as his all in all. As the foundation of his hope of pardon, peace, and acceptation with God; and as his title to future glory. And as He, who alone could keep and preserve him to that state, and put him into the possession of it. The Father has given Him power over all flesh, that He might give eternal life to as many as He hath given Him. Oh! the holy ardour of this excellent saint and great apostle, to improve in spiritual knowledge, fervent love, and true wholeness; he was so intent on these things, that he regarded nothing else. And herein he proposes himself as an example to others. Could we imitate him, O how happy should we be!

I think it may not be improper to make some observations on the gracious experience of this eminently holy person. And,

1. Surely we must be convinced, that as the essence of grace consists in a spiritual knowledge of Christ, growth in it necessarily supposes an increasing acquaintance with His excellency and glory, as the Head and Saviour of the church. For if real grace is a

perception of His beauty in His person, and of His suitableness to our condition in the character of a Redeemer, certainly an advancement therein must consist in more clear views of His glory, which never fail of changing our minds in a higher degree into the heavenly image, even from glory to glory. Hence is this exhortation given us: — “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.” A mind wholly destitute of the spiritual knowledge of Christ, is devoid of grace. For without this knowledge, the heart cannot be good. And where there is but low degree of it, there is but a small measure of grace. Only let it be observed, that it is an understanding of spiritual things themselves that is designed, and not merely a perception of their truth. Persons capable of the latter, may eternally remain incapable of the former. For this kind of knowledge is proper only to holy spiritual persons.

2. All endeavors after improvement in holiness, without mixing faith with the great doctrines of the gospel, whereof Christ is the sum and substance, will prove ineffectual. One important end of the Christian ministry is to promote spirituality and heavenly mindedness in believers; and this end cannot be answered but by proposing to their consideration evangelical truths, and their acting faith upon them. That ministry, therefore, which is most spiritual, is best suited to answer this great design. Such who act in that sphere in the church, under the influence of various motives, may determine to say little, if anything, in the course of their ministry, on some points of doctrine; but as this is not to their honor, so it is not to the advantage of those who hear them. And to such a height is this prudential caution carried by many, as that very little is declared concerning the origin of our salvation, viz., the divine sovereignty on which it entirely rests, and into which it must wholly be resolved. Also concerning the certain efficacy of the death of Christ, because that is inconsistent with the corrupt notion of a general ransom; nor concerning unconditional justification, nor of the determining influence of the grace of God, on whomsoever it is exerted, in order to their conversion. The effects hereof are ignorance, and a lifeless formality in religion.

3. When we enquire into the state and frame of our souls, let us especially consider how Christ and evangelical doctrines stand in our esteem. If Christ is not precious, dear, and infinitely valuable in our account, we know Him not, nor have a just claim to the character of believers. Unto them that believe, He is precious. If He is in our estimation, fairer than the children of men; the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely; — if His person is the object of our choice above all others, because of that transcendent glory we see in Him; — if His benefits are the matter of our delight, joy, and the ground of all our future hopes, in times of trial, temptations, and spiritual distress, occasioned by a sense of sin, deserved curse, wrath, and vengeance; and we place our confidence therein, let what will be the issue. — If our souls act thus, upon a conviction of the wisdom, fitness, and glory of this method of salvation; if the thoughts we have of Him, of His benefits, and His grace, afford us our chiefest pleasure; and if we lament that we know Him and love Him no more, and serve Him no better; if we value the gospel, as it is a revelation of Him, in what He is in Himself, in what He is of God made to us, we have reason to conclude that we are passed from death unto life, and shall not come into condemnation; and that grace is growing in us.

4. Hence we may learn what is to be our aim under a declension, in order to a revival of our graces, and wherein that revival consists.

What saint soever is declined in grace, whether he is gone off from the practice of his duty or not, Christ and the truths of the gospel are less valued by him, than formerly they were. His thoughts are less employed on the person of Christ, and he hath not the same relish and savour of evangelical truths. He is not so much conversant with them, nor hath the same pleasure in them as formerly. His mind is entertained with other objects, and his affections are grown cool to heavenly things. If this is our case, as it certainly is the sorrowful condition of many professors in our days; and considering how general this is, it is very much, if it is not thus with us in some degree; let us be persuaded of this, as a certain truth, that a revival under this melancholy decay, must begin where we were directed by

the Holy Spirit at our first conversion, to begin in our acting's God ward, viz., in an application unto Christ, who is our life, our all, and in a renewed acceptation of the report of the gospel concerning Him, in His person, offices, work, and precious benefits. Without this, an alteration for the better is not to be expected; for if it is, we shall certainly meet with a sad disappointment. Grace when decayed will never recover its vigour, unless it is acted on those glorious objects, which it is a disposition to view and embrace with delight.

Mortification of sin is the other general branch of duty, whereunto true grace disposes Christians.

Sin dwells in them. When they would do good, evil is present with them. And of the flesh, or unregenerate part, these things may be observed, viz., that no good thing dwells in it. The nature of it is wholly evil, and it is entirely contrary to grace; and, therefore, no good can be educed out of it. Fire may as soon be struck out of ice, as good dispositions and motions be produced in the corrupt part of the regenerate. And it will never be prevailed upon to concur with the new principle in any of those acts which it puts forth; hence the mind of a believer is at no time wholly spiritual and holy in its acts; there is more or less of a residency, or an impulsive resistance in his soul to what is holy, at all seasons. He is never so heavenly, as to have nothing of carnality arising in his mind; so that his purest actions are tinctured with a sinful defilement; and he is not without cause of shame and self-abasement in his best moments. All his righteousness's are as filthy rags. No persons are more remote from real holiness, than those who conceit that they have nothing of sin. It may be taken for granted that there is no true love to God in that man, who is confident that he hath no aversation of mind from God.

Again, as the flesh constantly opposes what is good, so it disposes the will to what is evil; and all its motions, as under its direction, are towards objects that are vain and carnal. Besides, the violence of it is sometimes very great, and it captivates the will and the affections, notwithstanding the opposition which grace makes against it. Farther, it is seated in the heart, and hath possession in all its powers. The understanding, the will, and the affections, are all subject to its

cursed influence. Hence darkness, obstinacy, and vanity, are found in the minds of the best. Moreover, grace or the new creature is not more heartily engaged in the service of God, than the flesh is disposed to the service of sin; and it is as possible to bring the spiritual part into an actual rebellion against God, as to prevail with the unregenerate part to subject itself to His authority. And, therefore, though there are not two distinct rational principles of operation in a believer, there are two distinct springs of action, in the one intelligent principle of operation in him, viz., in his mind; and one gives the will one direction, and the other gives it another, as contrary as can be; so that he acts according to one spring of action in one way, and according to the other spring of action in another way, and in both spontaneously; for those contrary actions are both voluntary, because the will is the subject of both these principles, sin and grace. It, therefore, chooses evil freely, and it voluntarily inclines to good. And unto neither is it wholly or only disposed. For the choice of evil is not made, without opposition from grace; nor is the choice of good, without opposition from sin. Hence it follows that though all the powers in a Christian are concerned, both in acts of sin, and in acts of holiness, yet none of his powers are wholly and only exerted in acts of either kind. The presence of sin, prevents the mind from being entirely spiritual and heavenly, in any of its acts; and the presence of grace, prevents its being wholly evil in any of its actions. And, therefore, there is a great difference in the manner of a regenerate man's sinning, and of the unregenerate man's, though the external acts may be the very same. The unregenerate are wholly evil in acts of sin, the regenerate are not so. For as the good actions of the saints have not the concurrence of the flesh with the spirit in them; so the regenerate part concurs not with the unregenerate part, in their sinful actions. Grace opposes sin, and sin opposes grace; and neither principle hath, nor can have the heart wholly at its direction, because it is the subject of both, as determining principles of operation of a contrary nature. And, consequently, there is such a war in the breast of a believer, as all unregenerate persons are wholly unacquainted with. They are

strangers to that grief and pain, joy and sorrow, which are the effects of this combat between the flesh and spirit in the saints. They have not that will to good, nor that reluctance to evil, which regenerate persons experience within themselves, Mortification of sin is the great duty, and it ought to be the constant business of a Christian. With respect to it, we may observe, that it supposes not the extirpation of sin out of the heart; it will retain its being in the soul. This law is so deeply engraven on our minds, that we cannot efface it. The highest measure of grace we receive in this state, expels not this troublesome inmate, it keeps its residence in the heart. And its nature is not at all altered. It is still what it was, and all its motions and acts are the very same which they always were. Regeneration is not an amendment of our corrupt nature, but the implantation of a contrary principle in our souls. Nor hath the old man lost any of his members; he is complete in all his parts, though his dominion is taken away. The flesh in its disposition continues to be the very same it ever was, and therefore, the same thoughts, the same desires, and the same corrupt motions in the affections, may arise and be stirred up, as were before grace was wrought in the soul.

Mortification of sin implies these things.

1. Abstinence from the practice of evil. Lust is very fertile in conception, and its aim is to bring forth every monstrous foetus with which it is pregnant. Grace is a check upon it, and stifles numerous of its productions, as soon as they are formed; they never see the light, nor become visible to any eye, but that of the soul itself, and unto the all-penetrating eye of God, who knows us far better than we know ourselves. And this watchfulness upon lust, lest it break forth, is extended to all its various branches, its sensitive, and also its intellectual part. Some who seem much mortified to sensual lusts, are greatly captivated by intellectual lusts. They are not swine indeed, or they do not wallow in the filth of uncleanness, drunkenness, and other fleshly gratifications; but they are full of pride, covetousness, envy, malice, and contempt of others; which are lusts as hateful as any an intelligent creature can indulge in. True grace opposes sins of every kind, not only those of the flesh, but of

the mind also. That which is an opposition to sin, as sin, must be as extensive as sin itself is. It is the property of real grace not to connive at, or nourish any evil.

2. The regenerate part is an opposition to internal acts of sin, as well as watchfulness against the breaking forth thereof in external acts. Without which there is no purity of heart, or nothing of that holiness which is indispensably required to future happiness. Many seem to think otherwise; and, therefore, so long as lust breaks not forth into outward acts of sin, they are content, and think all is well. As for thoughts of folly, and the first motions of the will and affections towards what is evil, these give them no uneasiness at all. For they have worked themselves up into a persuasion that they shall not be accountable for their thoughts to Him who requires our hearts, and if we give Him them not, He receives nothing from us He values in the least measure. This was the case of the Pharisee's, whom our Lord compares unto whited sepulchers, which are beautiful without; but within full of dead men's bones. Men may appear fair, whose hearts are full of filth and putrefaction. Evangelical mortification of sin not only respects the behaviour, but the heart; there it begins — the thoughts, desires, and affections, are principally the seat of it. Real grace is not content with regularity of conduct, — its aim is to introduce into the mind spirituality; abhorrence of evil, in the root and spring of it, love to God, and delight in a conformity of soul to His will. Where these things are not in some measure, there is nothing of that mortification which God requires of men. Lust is not killed, maimed, or rendered incapable of acting. Its life is continued, it remains entire in all its parts, and it exerts itself, even in the most sanctified, in a surprising variety of ways, to their disturbance, vexation, and inexpressible grief, many times, and especially when temptations are permitted to assault their souls. Then it is kindled in the mind; and unless seasonable supplies of grace are immediately afforded, to assist against it, and check its violence, it will assuredly prevail in such a season, even in the most spiritual of the saints. Hence the apostle advises them to consider themselves, “lest they also be tempted.” If grace in a believer is left to itself to struggle

with sin under a temptation, lust will certainly get the better of it, and prevail to such a degree, as may be matter of sorrow to him all the remaining part of life. Sin is far from being dead, mutilated, or deprived of power for action. Still it is true that grace desires its destruction, and rejoices greatly because of that foundation it hath to conclude upon its expulsion out of the soul at death. Oh! says the Christian, that is worth dying for. Let this earthly tabernacle shake, decay, and be dissolved, that I may no longer, nor any more forever be distressed by this innate enemy, which continually annoys and assaults me, and sometimes with so much fury and violence, as strikes me with terror, and causes me to fear that I shall not be able to hold out in the combat. Sin is impatient of the restraints laid upon it by grace; and grace is uneasy with the motions of sin. Hence there is action and reaction continually in the mind of a saint. Sin inclines him one way, grace disposes him to another, even a quite contrary way. And, therefore, he cannot do what he would, and as he would, neither with respect to duty nor evil. The spiritual part is often prevented from performing duty in such a manner as it desires, through the opposition of the flesh. And lust is hindered of gratifying itself in that manner it seeks and endeavors to do, because grace opposes it, and sharply remonstrates against its motions and tendency. But of this opposition between sin and grace, holiness and unholiness, unregenerate persons have no perception at all. Nor do good men always express themselves on this subject of mortification, consistent with their own and the experience of other holy persons; whereby the faith and hope of gracious souls are sometimes weakened, and occasion is given to unbelief to prevail against faith. This is the effect of in advertency, and of a want of due attention to the contrary workings of sin and grace in their own souls. Much skill and spiritual wisdom are required to speak on such subjects as immediately affect the experience of Christians; and these are not acquired but by the gracious instruction of the Holy Spirit, and a careful observance of ourselves. It is full as necessary for ministers to be diligent in reading their own hearts, as it is to be assiduous in reading of books. Without the former, they will not

have the tongue of the learned, nor know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.

3. The influence of the Spirit of God upon the principle of grace is absolutely necessary hereunto. The difference is very great between grace and sin, or between the old man and the new man, relating to ability for action. The flesh needs no external influence to quicken it to action. It is at all times capable of exerting itself, without assistance from without. It is a self mover; so is not grace; that depends upon an external cause to quicken and excite it. The saints can sin, without being acted by another; but they cannot act in a holy spiritual manner, without assistance from Christ, who is their Head of life and influence. Without Him they can do nothing. They are not sufficient of themselves, as of themselves, to think anything that is good and holy.

And, therefore, good men often pray for heavenly aid and assistance. Self endeavors to mortify sin will always prove ineffectual. The Holy Spirit is the sole Author of this work. And,

1. He gives us a sense of sin's evil nature, and maintains it in our hearts, without which we shall never be in earnest in an opposition to sin and its interest. And it is only in the light of divine grace that we discern its malignity and abominable nature, which discernment engages the soul to seek after its ruin.

2. The blessed Spirit of God suggests to our minds such considerations and motives to watchfulness against sin's encroachments, as are of the most persuasive nature, whereby we are awakened to use diligence in the business of opposition to sin.

3. He makes us sensible of, and warns us against temptations, which are great incentives to lust; and influences us to oppose them, and gives us strength against them, and by His all powerful assistance, we repel their force.

4. The divine Spirit communicates vigour to our graces, and maintains their exercise. Sin is no farther truly mortified, than grace is exercised in an opposition to 2. A bare abstinence from acts of sin may be without a principle of grace, and consequently, without the exercise of that principle in the minds of those in whom it is; but that

is not that mortification the Scripture speaks of, and which is the incumbent duty of the saints. That is an abstinence from evil arising from a dislike and hatred of it, as it is displeasing to God, grieving to His Spirit, and prejudicial to our noblest part. And these things necessarily suppose the acting's of the new creature in us, in a way of faith, hope, love, godly repentance, and self-denial. No unregenerate person really is engaged in the mortification of his lusts, nor is the regenerate man any farther exercised in this necessary work than as divine grace is in activity. That subdues and keeps sin under in the soul, which reigns in opposition to it, through righteousness unto eternal life; which is grace, and nothing else.

And yet how many poor souls delude themselves with hopes of real mortification of sin, because it is, by various considerations, which are taken from the consequences of sin, prevented breaking forth into external acts! Within it rages and rules the mind, though it is, as to outward acts, laid under restraint by terror, occasioned and kept up in the breast through a sense of its direful effects. Conviction will not suffer a man to sin quietly, it will raise a dreadful storm in his mind, and compel him to think closely of what, according to the just constitution in the law, is the wages of sin, viz., eternal death. Hence he resolves not to indulge his criminal inclinations; but his will is not thereby turned off from evil, and towards holiness. The former is not his aversion, nor the latter the object of his choice and delight. His conscience is against sin, as it is an unfit thing, and attended with dreadful effects; but his will is in the interest of sin, and he would make no difficulty of complying with its solicitations, provided it did not expose his person to danger and misery. Many, it is to be feared, owe all the denial of their vicious desires to this remonstrance the natural conscience makes against sin. The only reason why they refuse to gratify lust is, such gratification will destroy their peace, and involve them in trouble, which is not easy to be borne with.

The gospel furnishes believers with many very cogent motives to watchfulness against sin.

(1.) I begin with the almost exploded doctrine of election. That is an eternal, sovereign, and gracious appointment of men to a participation of real holiness in this state, and unto perfect holiness in the future. It is a purpose of everlasting date; an act which passed in the divine mind before the foundation of the world, whereby holiness in its beginning is secured to the objects of that decree in time, and complete holiness in eternity. This is a sovereign act. It is a free act of God's will; and not an act which proceeds on the foundation of right in the creature unto those blessings, it is a designation of its objects to the enjoyment of. The creature cannot reasonably be supposed to have a right to any favors from God, but such as are included in the first covenant, on the ground of its obedience. And the want of such obedience as that covenant required, is a forfeiture of all right to those privileges, which that covenant contains, and subjects it to all the inconveniences and miseries therein threatened. And, therefore, it is a senseless thought that the creature can acquire a right to such blessings as far transcend in excellency and glory, those which the first covenant promises. And where a right to favors can take place in none, sovereignty must be the foundation of a decree to bestow them on some. Again, it is a gratuitous act, and the effect of mere goodness, grace, and mercy. A design to confer honor on such whose conduct justly exposes them to everlasting shame and disgrace; a resolution to make those forever happy, who, according to equity, are obnoxious to endless misery, can arise from no other cause than kindness and mercy. Such is the decree of election. And that it is a purpose of conveying holiness, the Scriptures plainly teach; under which notion, it is a precious doctrine to the saints, who know that holiness necessarily enters into happiness, and desire no other felicity than what is at least inseparably connected with a perfection of purity. With them it is a very engaging motive to endeavor after holiness, and a great encouragement ultimately to hope for a complete victory over all sin.

As for others who object to this doctrine, as of a discouraging nature to serious minds, who are in doubt whether they are elected

or not; it may be observed, that they form the objection, without a due consideration of the nature of it, for it is a precious foundation of faith and hope to every man who hath the grace of it in the lowest measure. And if by serious minds they do not mean regenerate persons, then I affirm that they have no right at present to that consolation which the gospel provides. And with respect to such who may be easy under a prevalence of sin, from an imagination of their being elected, they are guilty of great impiety and senselessness too; for they discover no approbation of the design of election; or a desire that that design might take place in them; and, consequently, what pleasure they have therein, is not in the true nature of it; but in a false and impious notion of a doctrine that is according to godliness. On the other hand, those who content themselves in sinful neglects and criminal gratifications, because they cannot presently be assured of their election, and reproach the doctrine on that account, I would entreat the favor of them to spare their reproaches, at least till such time as they are truly desirous of being holy, for as yet they have nothing of holiness in them; and when in some degree they shall become truly holy, it is great odds if they do not change their opinion concerning this doctrine. Holiness is the fruit of it. And a good hope through grace of an interest in the blessings springing from that divine purpose, hath a most sweet and determining influence upon the minds of the saints to love, adore, praise, and yield obedience unto God in all things. Persons who rejoice in a humble hope of being chosen to holiness, can never, according to the same principle, take pleasure in sin. That which approves of the design of election, is the result of it. And where there is a true approbation of that design, there that design is in part already executed, and will be fully accomplished hereafter. If any think they should like to be holy in the next world, but are very well satisfied to remain unholy till the moment they depart out of this, they only delude themselves in those thoughts. True grace is a desire of present purity. I confess that I am not solicitous about the encouragement of many sorts of persons, which some are. I think that no man hath a title to evangelical comforts, who is not the

subject of evangelical dispositions. It is greatly to be wished that this was strictly observed, in endeavors to administer consolation to the souls of men.

If it were, it would quickly appear that there is no need to mince or conceal any doctrine of the gospel, lest such should be discouraged who give the least evidence of a right to divine consolation; nor any necessity of advancing anti-evangelical notions, in order to relieve and comfort spiritually humble souls under their sorrows. Nay, which is far more, it is true that no such notions, however plausible they may seem to some, are calculated to afford them encouragement and hope of obtaining salvation. It is a very easy work to prove that universal grace, which from its own nature is not effectual, is wholly unsuited to comfort humble and spiritually convinced sinners; and that it is only fitted to nourish the natural pride of men, which must be subdued, if their souls are ever saved. I am no more concerned for the consolation of a man who is not convinced that he is irrecoverably lost and ruined forever, in himself, than a physician would think himself obliged to administer medicine to a person in perfect health. Until men know that only hell or eternal damnation, according to righteousness and equity, can be expected by them, on the foundation of their own works, I shall never be solicitous at all about their encouragement and consolation. All such as are disposed to encourage a hope in sinners of enjoying heaven, without a sense of their misery and helplessness in themselves, have no warrant from God for what they act in this business. A man must first be convinced of his being obnoxious to divine wrath, and irrecoverably so, as to himself, either in whole or in part, before he will submit to God's appointed way of salvation. And to such the doctrine of predestination contains nothing of a discouraging nature in it, let some men cavil as they please. On the contrary, it is a precious foundation of solid hope and comfort to all such persons, who are the only men upon earth that have a right to evangelical peace, joy, and consolation. And in proportion to their spiritual acquaintance with this doctrine, will their spiritual and holy obedience be in the degrees of it. The notion of election to

everlasting life may be abused; but the grace of it never can be; let all its adversaries reproach it as they will now, for which they must shortly be accountable to Him, whose this doctrine is; and which they are capable of knowing is His, by that clear revelation He hath given of it in His sacred Word.

(2.) Another engaging motive to abstain from sin, is the saints relation to God. They are His sons and daughters; the consideration of which influences them not to touch the unclean thing, sin. Grace disposes them to reason thus with themselves: it is certainly most reasonable and fit that I who am so beloved, so dignified, and entitled to privileges so numerous and so great by God, and that in a way of mere grace and rich mercy, should abstain from all appearance of evil.

(3.) Redemption, or the pardon of sin by the blood of Christ, hath the same powerful influence on the mind. A sense of remission produces joy; an apprehension of the expensive price of pardon, excites in the mind a holy indignation against sin. He who pretends to the enjoyment of a sense of the forgiveness of his offences by the agony and death of Jesus Christ, without experience of a hatred of sin, is a stranger to that unspeakable privilege.

And what a man hates, he will certainly endeavor to avoid. This is the true reason why sin is not more subdued in us than it is; we are not, as we ought to be, employed in holy meditations on the sufferings of a dear Saviour in order to procure our pardon, and save our souls from wrath and hell. It is not possible that that man's thoughts can be much exercised on the sorrows, pains, reproaches, and the accursed death of Christ, with a view to his redemption from sin, who makes light of it, and is easy under its prevalence. Let but professors act faith much on a crucified Saviour, and I dare affirm that the work of the mortification of sin will be happily advanced in their souls.

(4.) The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers is a very persuasive motive to watch against sin. His presence with, and in the saints, is their honor and their security; and the consideration of His residence in their hearts, cannot fail of begetting and cherishing

desires of purity and holiness. How piercing is the thought of acting a part that is grieving to Him!

This is a subject worthy of greater enlargement; but the limits which I have prescribed to myself will not allow of it. And, therefore, I shall close it with answering two queries.

Query 1. May sin prevail in some particular acts, where true grace is, since that is opposite unto sin, and seeing it hath such important and so many weighty considerations to quicken it to watchfulness, against all the motions of evil in the heart?

Answer. No scruple can reasonably be admitted concerning the possibility of the prevalence of sin in some particular acts, even where true grace is. For we have infallible evidence of the real conversion of some in whom the old man has gained the predominancy, as to particular acts. And, therefore, let none presume peremptorily to say that a man hath no grace who is overtaken in a fault, concerning whom he hath had reason to hope well of. Some who have been so censorious in peremptorily judging another, have had sad occasion to change their opinion, by the advantage sin has obtained over themselves. Let all such beware that this prove not their own case. They have just cause to fear it may be, in such a frame of mind.

Query 2. How comes sin to prevail, since grace is always resident in the soul?

Answer. 1. A long interruption in the exercise of grace exposes the soul to numerous temptations and unto manifold snares, with the sad influence of each.

2. Sin in such a season gets great strength in the heart; and hence follow the breakings forth of it in the life, in some actions or other; sometimes in more, sometimes in fewer instances.