

The Certain and Final Perseverance of the Saints Asserted and Proved

Rev. Stephen Bloomer Balch

The first book printed in George-Town, Maryland (in 1791) contained the text of two sermons by the Reverend Mr. Stephen Bloomer Balch, the pastor of the Presbyterian Congregation in George-Town from its founding in 1780 to his death in 1833. For several years this was the only formally organized church in the community and Mr. (later Dr.) Balch was one of its most respected and influential citizens.

The sermons in question dealt with "the certain and final perseverance of the saints" based on the ninth verse of the seventeenth chapter of Job ... "The righteous shall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger."

Today, on the bicentennial anniversary of the Presbyterian Congregation in Georgetown (to use the modern spelling) we wish to honor our first pastor by publishing a facsimile copy of these sermons. So far as we can determine, only two copies are in existence. The Library of Congress has permitted us to photograph their copy to be used in this publication. The other copy is reported to belong to Princeton University.

Mr. Balch's message speaks to our first congregation, to all succeeding congregations and to today's members: "Those who advocate the final perseverance of the Saints, affirm, that a man, who is once made a child of God, by regeneration, justification, adoption, and sanctification, though he may, and frequently does fall into sin, yet he will persevere in his religious course of life, and will finally be made happy in the enjoyment of God forever." His brilliant and scholarly development of this belief must not be lost.

The few remaining fragile copies are carefully preserved in libraries, but practically speaking they are unavailable for readers. It is to provide this availability that the Congregation is offering a facsimile copy, in commemoration of our two hundredth anniversary.

The Bicentennial Committee of the Presbyterian Congregation in Georgetown ... 1980

Job 17:9 The righteous also shall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.

My friends,

An attachment to the doctrines and modes of practice, peculiar to each religious sect, has ever been discoverable in the conduct of their respective members. What appears strange is, this attachment has manifested itself by an open opposition to those who differed from them, and is deeply rooted and interwoven in the hearts of the wicked as well as the godly. We frequently see men notorious for wickedness, to appearance, as zealous, sometimes more so, for the special tenets and practices of their own sect, than the truly pious are for those which characterize the respective denominations to which they belong. Saint Paul was a Pharisee, and, as he himself declared in the presence of king Agrippa, he was one of the most straitest of that sect. Of all others, he was the most violent opposer and persecutor of Christ, in his mystical members. For this he had no reason more solid, than that the scheme of Christianity was directly opposed to that system of religion which he had adopted as his own. The Sadducees also, were avowed enemies to the doctrines and practices of the disciples of Christ; merely, because they believed and taught the resurrection of the dead, and a slate of future rewards and punishments, after death; all which they strenuously and boldly denied.

This attachment to and partiality for every punctilio, in what they supposed to be related either to the doctrines, or to the modes of practice introduced by Jesus Christ, were carried to an extravagant height by the apostles themselves, at

least in some instances.

The disciples were sent out to preach - to heal the sick - to raise the dead - and, to cast out devils: In their travels they met with one employed in expelling the evil spirits from those that were possessed. They straightway forbid him, because he did not do and say exactly as they did. But in this they erred; for our Saviour, in answer to their declaration, said, Forbid him not. Such was their zeal for their own party, that they would willingly, have destroyed those who acted contrary to their wishes. A village in Samaria would not receive their master: Lord, say they, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them? This was a manifestation of party-zeal, which was not according to knowledge; for our Saviour immediately turned and rebuked them, saying to them, Ye know not what spirit ye are of.

Human nature is the same in every age of the world; and therefore, whatever was the conduct and temper of religious sects, long ago, with respect to themselves, and to others who thought differently from them, this same conduct and temper are discoverable, in a greater or lesser degree, in the respective members of the several religious societies into which Christendom is, at present, divided. They have a zeal, not well regulated, and they are too closely wedded to every thing that may be called peculiar to themselves.

From this enthusiastic misplaced zeal, and from this narrow, partial temper, have originated, in a great measure, all the furious persecutions which have brought millions to the stake; drenched the world in human blood; disgraced rationality itself; and filled the pages, both of profane and sacred history, with the execrable deeds of men.

I am, pointedly, against persecuting, or speaking evil, or bitter things about any religious sect whatsoever. Let them only demean themselves, as good, peaceable members of the civil communities to which they respectively belong, and, I am fully persuaded, they ought to be privileged with the belief of their own peculiar doctrines; with the exercise of their own particular modes of worship, and with the full and free use of their own consciences. Every individual, and every religious sect, of a persecuting spirit, should read the speech, and copy the example of Gamaliel, a doctor of the law among the Jews. The Sadducees had laid hands upon, and put the apostles into the common prison, for teaching contrary to their faith and practice. An angel of the Lord had unbolted the doors of the prison, and commanded them to depart to the temple, and to speak to the people all the words of this life. When immediately engaged in fulfilling this mandate, a captain, with his officers, came, and as it appears, persuaded them to appear before the Jewish council for trial. They came. The high priest put many questions to them, which gave Peter an opportunity of addressing his judges in a warm and pointed manner. He did so. They were filled with resentment and indignation against the apostles. At this crisis, says the sacred historian, there stood up in the council a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; and he said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before those days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves; who was slain, and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him; he also perished, and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now, I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel, or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. There is so much good sense in this address, and there was, in my judgment, so much propriety in repeating it in this place, that I could not well avoid it. And I ardently wish the sentiments it contains were deeply engraven upon the hearts of all who call themselves Christians; and that their example set by Gamaliel, may ever be copied by mankind in general. In this case, more unanimity and love would every where abound among different denominations of Christians.

But notwithstanding what has now been said, and although persecution for the sake of religion ought to be held in detestation; yet, certainly, there can no good reasons be given which should hinder those, who think differently about matters of faith and practice, from talking, or writing, in a calm, dispassionate manner, about their respective opinions, that he, who is in an error, may meet with full conviction. The rule to be observed in this case, is to make use of soft words and hard arguments. This was our Savior's practice. When he saw men in an error, if that was very dangerous, he took the most effectual methods to shew them where their mistake lay; and he generally treated such with tenderness and compassion; exhibiting meekness of temper, for which he was eminently remarkable. The apostles themselves reasoned, both in private and in public, with those who had been misinformed, and by this mean directed

them into the right way. Sometimes those popular teachers disputed with men, who they knew had imbibed erroneous opinions; and the happy consequences commonly were, that they were convinced and brought to the knowledge of the truth.

What I have now said seems to justify the design, as well as the general strain of these discourses. The intention of them is to correct an error in doctrine, and the manner of doing this, is reasoning meekly and calmly. Had I found fault with some particular mode in practice, I should not have taken so much pains to correct it; but the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion should, I apprehend, be well supported and defended.

It is really distressing, to men of piety and sensibility, to see the children of the same father, the members of the same family, the followers of the same Jesus, and the expectants of the same future happiness, mutually encouraging variances and dissensions, one with another, about doctrines which, in fact, support the Christian system.

In no age, perhaps, have those variances and dissensions arisen to a greater height, than in the present. Tenets, which by many have been received as orthodox, are now, by great multitudes, entirely exploded, and others, directly opposite, are embraced, countenanced, and taught, both in public and private.

The certain and final perseverance of the Saints, is a doctrine which was certainly believed and published by the writers of the Old and New Testament. It has been embraced and firmly credited, by many of the faithful, ever since God has had a church in the world. Long ago it was contradicted by Arminius, a Low Country divine; and ever since his time, his followers and adherents have been its violent opposers.

The slate of the dispute, or question, seems to be this: Those who advocate the final perseverance of the Saints, affirm, That a man, who is once made a child of God, by regeneration, justification, adoption, and sanctification, though he may, and frequently does fall into sin, yet he will persevere in his religious course of life, and will finally be made happy in the enjoyment of God forever. - Those who deny the final perseverance of the Saints, assert, That a man of the above description, even when he has obtained the greatest degree of sanctification of which he is capable in this life, may, and frequently does fall away, from that advanced state of grace, totally and finally, insomuch, that after death he is made everlastingly miserable.

This, if I mistake not, is a just and fair slate of the different opinions entertained by those who contend about the final perseverance of the Saints. I fully agree, in judgment, with all who advocate this doctrine; not because it was taught me in my childhood, but because I find it clearly asserted and strongly supported by the Word of God; and, because it appears to me to be in the opinion, of the two, which is most consistent with reason, and the sentiments and experience of those who have had the best opportunity of acquiring an enlightened information.

Indeed, those who contend for, and teach the total and final apostasy of the believer, inculcate a doctrine, as I suppose, in its tendency, subservise of the Word of Truth; derogatory from the honor of God, and uncomfortable to the children of the heavenly King. And nothing but such a view of it could have induced me to appear in print, in vindication of that which stands directly opposed to it.

If we apprehend the meaning which the Spirit of God intended to convey by the text, the words of it contain and establish the whole truth for which we contend, and something more: For they assert, That a true believer shall persevere in his religious course of life; and, also, that he shall increase and grow in grace. He shall hold on his way: he shall be stronger and stronger. That is, he shall not only retain those graces, which were implanted in his soul when he was made a new creature, but those graces themselves shall, also, be increased, or strengthened, in his progress towards Heaven.

In my further enlargement upon this subject, I propose, through the assistance of Divine Grace,

I. To support and prove the doctrine contained in the text: - That a true believer will persevere in his religious course of life; and that he will grow in grace; or, in the words of the text, will hold on his way, and be stronger and stronger.

II. To state and answer some of the plainest and most weighty objections which are usually laid against the Saints Perseverance and Growth in Grace.

III. To conclude with a practical application of what may be said.

I. I am to support and prove the doctrine contained in the text; That a true believer will persevere in his religious course of life; and that he will grow in grace; or, in the words of the text, will hold on his way, and be stronger and stronger. This proposition is complex in its nature, and divides itself into two parts, each of which must be distinctly illustrated. If we can demonstrate the truth of this proposition, in both its parts, the opinion directly opposed to it, namely, That a true believer may, and frequently does, fall from grace, totally and finally, will of necessity, be superseded or set aside. There is so wide a difference between moving onward in the paths of holiness, having these graces strengthened and confirmed more and more; which graces, at first, constituted him holy, or righteous; and that of falling forever from grace, that to support and prove the former will, without doubt, destroy the latter. If the one is a truth, the other cannot but be false.

I confess, however, it puts me a little to a stand to fix upon a proper method of proceeding in this demonstration. There are some who will believe nothing which is not pointedly proven by Holy Scripture; many there are who wrest its meaning to their own destruction; and even when it is opened up to them, in a plain and rational way, they with great reluctance admit the light; and rather than confess their error, and ask further assistance, they often put such a construction upon it, as they suppose will best establish what they have adopted as an article of their faith. A third class depend much upon close reasoning, and the opinions and experience of men of genius and improved talents, for the confirmation and establishment of their beliefs about Christian Doctrines. It will be best, as I suppose, that the multitude at large may be satisfied; first to prove the doctrine by Scripture, and, in doing so, to avoid, as much as possible, making use of any passages, except such as are plain, that every one may see and be convinced of their proper application; and if at any time some proofs, a little dark and intricate, should be brought forward, these must be explained in a clear and satisfactory manner. When we have established the truth proposed, in the way now mentioned, we will give it all the support we can, by reason, and by the sentiments and experience of those who have had the best opportunities of knowing.

And oh! that the Spirit of God may enlighten my understanding, and guide my pen, while employed in vindicating his own truth.

1. Then, let us endeavor to support and prove the doctrine of the Saints Perseverance by the Word of God. This was given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine; for reproof; for correction; and, for instruction in righteousness. It is a sure word of prophesy, whereunto we do well that we take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. And, let Deists and Infidels say what they will, it contains all those things about religion which should be believed and practiced, by such as are seeking future happiness according to the will of their Creator.

I begin with the words of the wise and inspired Solomon, *Proverbs xxiv. 16. A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.* This is full to our purpose, and beautifully illustrates and supports that for which we contend. We grant, as I have already hinted, that a good man may, and frequently does fall into sin; but, at the same time, we strenuously assert, that he will be deeply penitent for his transgressions, and will still hold on his way. These ideas are clearly contained in the text just now mentioned. A just man falleth seven times; - that is, he falleth frequently; but still he riseth up again. Our antagonists cannot turn this argument against us, by saying, the Christian cannot be progressive in his religious course of life, when he falls: For they might as well assert, that a man, who sets out on a journey, and by chance stumbles and falls now and then, tho he rises and pursues his journey, is not progressive in his motion, as to say, that a Christian, who falls now and then into sin, though he repents of it, does not hold on in his religious course of life.

As a further testimony of the truth of this important and comfortable doctrine, let us attend to the words of God himself, published to the Israelites by his profit *Hosea, ii. 19, 20. And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord.* In these passages, the great God is the speaker, though he makes use of the prophet as an instrument, to confirm the believing Israelites in the faith of their perseverance. He makes the bargain, not for a day, a month, or a year - but for ever; and, in the tenor of the covenant he puts a gracious promise, which his justice, mercies, and faithfulness are bound to have fulfilled: I will betroth thee unto me, says he, for ever, that in righteousness, and in mercies, and in faithfulness.

To establish the truth more strongly and fully, and thereby to convince gainsayers, we have the express words of him who was greater than a prophet, even Jesus the Mediator, *John x. 28, 29. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand: My Father which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.* He is here speaking of true believers, to whom, he says, he gives eternal life; by which is plainly intended, that he communicates the principles of spiritual life in this world, which will issue in eternal life in that world which lies beyond the grave: - He adds, *And they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.* Comfortable doctrine, indeed, to every child of God! They have made an happy escape from that imminent danger of eternal death, to which they were every moment exposed, while in a state of nature! Their faces are turned towards the city of the living God; and though they are in an enemies land, yet the Captain of their Salvation has taken fast hold of them: None, however subtle; none, however envious, shall be able to pluck them out of his hand. He goes on to confirm believers more and more in the Faith of the Perseverance: For this purpose, he brings to their view the power of God - My Father is greater than all: He is above all - superior to all the believer's enemies, both temporal and spiritual; and surely, as if he had said, he will never permit created weakness to overcome infinite, uncreated power. He will not stop here, but from the greatness and superiority of his Father, concludes, for the consolation of his followers, that no man is able to pluck them out of his Father's hand. He represents believers as held fast by the hand of God, so that none can, by strength, power, or stratagem, arrest them from him. My father, says he, is almighty; he has an arm of power; his hand is invincibly strong; worlds unnumbered are supported and upheld by it; and, surely, since he has taken hold of believers with this powerful hand, they need not be afraid that he will suffer them utterly to fall away from grace.

Nothing can be more full to our purpose, than the words of the apostle Peter: *1 Peter i. 5. Who are kept hidden by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.* That we may see the scope, and feel the full force of this passage of God's word, when applied, as a proof, for establishing the Final Perseverance of the Saints, we must observe, the apostle in the preceding verses had been excited to ascriptions of praise and thanksgiving to God the Father, and to his Son Jesus Christ; because, by the resurrection of the latter, believers had been begotten again unto a lively hope; and to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away - which inheritance, he assure the saints, was reserved in heaven for them; who, says he, are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation. Here we are presented with a view of two things employed in the believer's preservation and perseverance; they are, the Power of God and Faith. The power of the Omnipotent God is engaged to bring him to glory: That almighty power, which nothing can resist - that almighty power, which upholds the vast fabric of creation - that almighty power, before which the strongest created beings feel their absolute weakness - that almighty power, for fear of which all the infernal hosts shrink into the burning pit, and would gladly hide themselves from its irresistible operations. This power, on the one hand, exerts itself in promoting every believer's perseverance. On the other hand, faith, saving faith, and if saving, it will bring the believer to salvation, is employed as an instrument in the preservation and perseverance of the saints. Faith realizes the invisible things of the other world; presents them to the view of the servants of God; gives them ravishing conceptions of that exceeding and eternal weight of glory, for the enjoyment of which they have long sighed; teaches them a contempt of the vanities of the world; fortifies them against temptations of every kind, and puts songs of victory and triumph in their mouths. When, by faith, believers get a sight of the promised land, and the glories and pleasures to be enjoyed there, their enemies may combine, and plan their ruin, but they cannot effect it. Death, in her most frightful shape, will have no influence in producing a revolt; but, frequently, the stronger the temptations, and the more fierce the torments employed to make them cease from their perseverance, so much the more are they determined to overcome; and so much the more are their views of future happiness rendered clear and attracting, and their anxieties, for the enjoyment of it, strengthened and increased. This was the case with Stephen, the first Christian Martyr. His persecutors were full of rage, and gnashed on him with their teeth, and in his presence prepared instruments for his death. But, we are told, his face was like the face of an angel - and now his faith became so strong, that it evidently disclosed to him the glories of the other world; for he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

I am so much pleased with this subject, and find such a fullness in Holy Writ for its support, that I hardly know when or where to stop. Unprejudiced Christians will be glad to read the many proofs I am bringing forward to establish the Saints progressive motion towards Heaven; and, for their comfort and encouragement, I shall still proceed: - See, to this purpose, *John iv. 14. 1 Peter i. 23. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Being born again,*

not of corruptible feed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. In the one of these passages, grace, in the believer's heart, is compared to a fountain which is never dried up, or exhausted, but continually sends forth streams of water: In the other, it is compared to a feed that never dies; to a feed that is not subject to corruption. The comparisons, in both cases, are, no doubt, very just; and, if so, they prove, that grace, once communicated, can never be lost.

Let us now hear the conclusion of the seraphic Saint Paul, when speaking upon, and in support of, the saints progress in the paths of holiness. In the eighth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, he issues an absolute challenge to all created beings, and defies them, by their might, cruelty of policy, to effect a separation between Christ and his followers. *Who, says he, shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or persecution? or famine? or nakedness? or peril? or sword? For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* I ask those, who deny the believer's perseverance, what does the apostle mean by those expressions? Does he intend by them that the saints are in imminent danger of turning devils incarnate, and of going down to the sides of the pit? Surely you will not, you can not, you dare not take this sense from them. Read them with attention; consider their purport, and you must say, that Saint Paul, in these verses, declares that neither things in hell, nor things upon earth, nor yet things in heaven, acting separately or conjunctly, can, by any means, produce a separation between Christ and a believing soul; and, if this cannot be effected, every one of his genuine followers will persevere in his christian course of life.

Having established the truth contained in the first part of the proposition, by the testimony of scripture, I must now apply myself to prove the other part of it, in the same way, namely, That the graces of a true believer will be stronger and stronger as he advances onward toward heaven. Both the Old and the New Testament contain passages clearly indicative of this truth. For the sake of instruction and conviction let us read and examine the sense of the text: *The righteous shall be stronger and stronger. It is not said he may gather strength; but there is an absolute promise included in the words; He shall be stronger and stronger.* We must also observe, that God is the one who makes the promise, by his servant Job; and, surely, he is able to perform; neither is he a man that he should lie, or the son of man, that he should repent. From this, let us turn our eyes to a passage still more plain and convincing, *Prov. iv. 18. But the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* Grace, when first implanted in the heart, is like the morning light, both weak and dim. The light grows stronger as the sun advances; in like manner, as the Christian moves on toward heaven, his graces grow stronger and shine brighter. Let us read, to the same purpose, *Psalms xcii. 12, 13, 14. and Malachi iv. 2. The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that he planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing. But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall grow up as calves of the stall.*

We have, also, evidences of this truth in the New Testament: - *James iv. 16. But he giveth more grace. John xv. 2. And every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Philippians i. 6. Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* How exceedingly plain and strong are these texts, to prove the point under consideration; and how very hard is it to construe them in any other way, or to understand them as being applicable for the support of any other doctrine. He, that is, God, gives more grace; that is greater degrees of it. God the Father purges, by afflictions, trials and temptations, those who are real, though they may be weak believers, and by those means he renders them more fruitful - that is, their graces are made stronger; they shine brighter; have a greater similitude to God himself, and, in their lives and conversations, copy more exactly Jesus their great Forerunner and Redeemer. In the heart of every pious person, God has really begun a good work; and the opinion of Saint Paul was, that it would be carried on, not for a day, or a year, but until the day of Jesus Christ. He was convinced, that every true believer would be ripened for glory, and would come to his grave like a shock of corn in his proper season.

In pursuance of the method laid down, we must, secondly, prove the Saint's Perseverance and Growth in Grace by reasoning on it. We adduce, as arguments in support of the perseverance, God's tenderness and compassion for his children, and the high value he sets upon them. Every true believer is a child of God; a member of his numerous family. For every such child he hath bowels of compassion. Will he then suffer him to revolt entirely, and have his name blotted out of his book for ever? We shudder at the conclusion - we cannot believe it; for he tells us, by David,

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Will a tender father suffer the children of his youth and riper years to forsake his family forever? He will not: - Neither will God suffer those who are once made his, and enrolled with his children, entirely to revolt from him. On the contrary, he will make use of means by which he will attach them more and more to himself - He will enlarge their hearts, that they may run in the way of his commandments - He will draw them, that they may run after him. Besides, God sets a high value on believers. He calls them his own; considers them as his jewels; and, declares they shall be his in that day when he makes up his jewels. Will a man suffer his jewels to be lost? No; he prizes them at a high rate. Neither will God allow his sons, who are jewels in his eyes, to be lost; consequently they must having once set out upon their journey heaven-ward, continue in it until they arrive at the place of their destination.

The perseverance of the saints may be argued from the greatness of the price paid for them; from the continued intercession of the Redeemer, in their behalf; and from the great and precious promises made to them by God, in Christ. The price paid was infinite; for the human and divine natures were united in Jesus, which enhanced the value of his obedience and death. He was, also, the substitute and surety of believers; and when they are brought out of a state of nature, into a state of grace, his obedience and sufferings are considered by God, the Judge, as their own. But if they do not persevere, these are lost, with respect to them - Shocking idea! Shall we thus make a trifle of an all-perfect righteousness, and set at nought the superlatively great and stupendous sufferings of the Son of the eternal God? Christ also intercedes for the perseverance of believers: For we are told, by John, that if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. And he declared, himself, that his Father heard him always. He prayed for Peter, that his faith should not fail. His advocacy, or intercession, must be effectual, since his Father is ever ready to grant his requests. Believe it then, my friends, that the Savior of Men, though he was once transfixed to a cross, has been for many ages upon a throne, supporting the character of a Powerful Advocate for all believers. Shall the Christian's enemies then overcome one, who brought him at so great a price, and who constantly presents his obedience and sufferings to his Father, as arguments in favor of his progressive motion towards heaven? Certainly no. Besides, there are great and precious promises made, by God, to believers, in Christ; and we ought to believe that these promises will be fulfilled; and if so, every follower of the Lamb must, and will, persevere. I, says God to his people, will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee. To which, let me add the words of David. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not utterly be cast down; for the Lord upholdeth them with his hand.

The point under consideration may be proved from the union which takes place between Christ and his people: The union is the most intimate nature - it is like that of the head and the members; or, like that of the vine and the branches. Now he that is joined unto the Lord, is one Spirit, and he is made a partaker of the Divine Nature; how then is it possible, that the believer can apostatize from God, totally and finally? He is made a member of Christ, spiritually; he is cut off from the old stock, in which he was growing, in a state of nature, and he is really engrafted into Jesus Christ - the same spirit operates in both; surely then he must go forward towards the perfection of his nature.

Reason, also, tells us, that such an one will grow stronger and stronger; for, it is the nature of grace to aspire to its giver. As the Spirit of God carries on a work of sanctification in the man, it is his business to kill the evil qualities of the heart; the person's love for the world is destroyed; his corruption of every kind are gradually weakened, and, by consequence, grace takes a deeper and a faster hold of his heart. The more he dies to sin, the more and the stronger does he grow in grace. He bears the fruits of the spirit, love, joy, peace, faith, meekness, humility and patience; and these, by degrees, gathering strength, render him ripe for glory, and make him a suitable companion for saints and angels.

For the sake of argumentation, we will, for a moment, grant all that our antagonists contend for; and we will say, a believer may, and frequently does fall from grace, totally and finally, and consequently, does not grow in grace: Then let us notice the absurdities that will unavoidably take place. A true believer, has true faith. That faith is the effect of God's having made choice of him - and that choice is the unchangeable purpose of God. Now, if he loses his faith, the eternal purpose of God must also be lost, or, at least, rendered ineffectual: This is an absurdity, too gross to be admitted. Again, if the believer does not persevere, he loses his faith; but faith is the condition of the Covenant of Grace, and therefore the Covenant itself may be also be abrogated, with respect to those who cease to believe; but, the covenant also is immutable; for God says, expressly, *I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me, Jeremiah*

xxxii. 40. Again, if the believer falls away from grace, totally and finally, or does not persevere, it may sometimes happen, that he believes has not eternal life, even when he does believe; for he loses that life, and, consequently, it could not be an eternal life: But Christ says, expressly, That every believer, without exception, has eternal life abiding in him. The believer, say our antagonists, does not increase or grow stronger in grace - Then he grows weaker. But this would be to say, That a man may be a Child of God, and yet not have the work of sanctification carried on in his heart at all - Very absurd would such a conclusion be! For the Spirit of God is given as a spirit of holiness to all and every Christian, and he kills sin, and strengthens grace. I have been thus particular to put this matter out of dispute, and to vindicate a great and comfortable Gospel Truth from illiberal abuse.

We come now to the third and last source of argumentation, by which we mean to support, or at least, to strengthen the Doctrine of the Saints final Perseverance and Growth in Grace: viz. By the opinions and experience of those who have had the best opportunities of acquiring an enlightened information.

I do not mean, that the opinions and experience of men shall be taken, as absolute, incontestible evidence, in favor of the proposition we are endeavoring to establish. For it ever was and ever will be a truth, that good and wise men are liable to mistakes. But granting this, they ought to have some weight in determining our belief about doctrines. - Upon the saints final perseverance and growth in grace, the fathers, who succeeded the apostles in the work of the ministry, spoke very clearly. Tertullian, eminently pious and learned, has this remarkable expression: - "How glorious a thing is it that Christians are carried on by little and little, until they arrive to perfect happiness, in the new Jerusalem." Saint Gregory says, "That the righteous man travels on, from one degree of grace and strength unto another, until he meets the light of heaven." These venerable fathers seem, in those sentences, to have given the opinions of those who lived in their respective ages.

I need not tell my readers, that Zuinglius, Calvin, and Luther contended for the doctrine we advocate; for they must, generally, be acquainted with their sentiments concerning it. In support of the saints progressive motion in the paths of holiness, and of their growth in grace, let me call, as witness, the determinations of the different Synods and General Councils which have long adorned the Presbyterian Churches in several parts of the world. The Low Country divines, of this denomination, have long since established them both, in deliberate assemblies. The Synods and councils of England, Scotland, and America, have done the same. Hear their sense of the matter, in the seventeenth article of that church: "They whom God hath accepted in his beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from a state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein until the end, and be eternally saved." And this article has been accepted as a part of the creed of the Presbyterian Church in America. In another place they speak of believers spiritual nourishment and growth in grace, which certainly is inseparably connected with perseverance.

Next I must bring into my assistance the sentiments of the pious framers of the articles and liturgy of the Protestant Episcopal Church, who, certainly, advocated that for which we contend. Hear their conclusion in their seventeenth article. They have been speaking of those whom God hath chosen for happiness out of mankind - Such, they assert, art bro't by Christ, to everlasting salvation. They go on and say, "Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose, his spirit working in due season: They, through grace, obey the calling: They be justified freely: They be made sons of God by adoption: They be made like the image of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ: They walk, religiously in good works; and, at length, by God's mercies, they attain everlasting felicity." Can any thing be stronger or more full to our purpose, than what we have now repeated? Certainly no.

I am unhappy, that my not being acquainted with the articles of the Baptist, and some other churches of note, prevents me from bringing in their sentiments, as supports of the proposition endeavored to be proved in this discourse. That the members of the Baptist Church think as we do about it, I know to be a fact; but the words they make use of, I cannot put down here.

What shall I say more? Let experience, or that knowledge which Christians have acquired by trial and practice, here speak in behalf of the saints perseverance and growth in their grace. She will, I am persuaded, give in her verdict in our favor: - She will force every believer to say, that, in the midst of temptations, and sins, and afflictions, he has found a strong inclination to go forward; that he has often felt a heavy stroke given to the body of death within him, and, by

consequence, he has felt his graces taking a deeper root in his soul, and becoming stronger and more fruitful. Could we, my brethren, pass from this to the other world, and appeal to the experience of all the righteous, who have arrived safe in those realms of perfect peace and love, I am fully persuaded we should have a new illustration of both parts of the proposition. They would tell us, that since their admission in to those regions of felicity, they have often been exhilarated and lost in wonder, when they took a view of the instruments employed by their divine Master, in conducting them to, and preparing them for, Heaven. They would, there is no doubt, extol, in songs of joy, the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of their Almighty Benefactor. Their tongues would loudly recommend that faith by which they walked while on earth, and which, with respect to them, is now turned into sight. Above all, hallelujahs would burst from every mouth to their Advocate, Jesus Christ. They would all, with one consent, acknowledge, that back to perdition they could not have gone; that before them the path was opened, along which they were compelled to travel; and, that all things wrought together to establish and strengthen their graces. This would be the language of the Patriarchs: It would be re-echoed by the united voices of all the Prophets, Apostles and Martyrs. In a single word, the meanest Saints, in the upper Temple, would tell us, experimentally, that perseverance and growth in grace are inseparably connected with true religion; and that, from the moment of their conversion until their dissolution, they made progress heaven-ward, and became stronger and stronger.

I have now, my friends, proved the first doctrinal proposition: In doing this, a variety of arguments have been employed. These have been drawn from scripture, reason, opinions and experience. This was done in order to satisfy every class of men, and to put the matter in dispute, as much as possible, beyond controversy.*

Leaving the objections usually laid in against what has been said, together, with an improvement of the whole, for the ground of another discourse, I conclude this in the words of the Apostle Jude: - *Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you, faultless, before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wife God, our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

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Note.

* I am conscious that the attentive reader will perceive some small disorder in the management of the different arguments made use of: This was occasioned by the complex nature of the proposition laid down for discussion. It consisted of two parts, or branches, inseparably connected, and yet capable of distinct illustration. - It was, therefore, necessary to have an eye to both, through the whole of the sermon, and to establish them in the order in which they were at first mentioned. They go hand in hand, and the one or the other being proved, the other is inferable from it; for there must be growth in grace where there is perseverance, and, certainly, there can be no growth in grace if perseverance is wanting.