

more effectual in causing the decay of the imperfect church, than the natural elements in damaging the unfinished building. As it is with an individual, so is it with a church,—if there is no progress, there is more or less of retrogression;—if there is no growth there is decay. The building of the church is not yet completed, and therefore the builders should take care that the work be not intermitted from any fault of theirs, and that in their anxiety to advance greatly one part of the work, they do not neglect another and an essential part, though one which may not be so important in their estimation. But

2. While diligence in the use of means is necessary, another duty appears manifestly from the doctrine of our text to be equally necessary, viz, that it be looked to that no means be used which are not in accordance with the full, clear, and unalterable directory of God's word.—Were it our object to collect and keep together a body called a church—strong from its numbers, its worldly wealth, and political influence, we might succeed though we neglected this duty,—nay, would be far more likely to succeed by neglecting than by following it. We know that the church (but falsely so called) which can boast of the greatest number of adherents, the greatest amount of wealth and political influence in the world,—employs for effecting its ends, not means in accordance with the word of God, but means completely antagonistic to it. But if our object be, individually, in our separate spheres of labour, to be instrumental in adding to the true church of the living God, such as shall be saved, and “building up these in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation,” and collectively to found and build up in these lands a visible church which shall be instrumental in promoting the same end, then, however anxious we may be to advance our object, let us be careful that in the means we may propose to use, we consult, not the maxims of worldly wisdom or expediency, nor the example of other churches or individuals, but the statute-book of our Head and King. Temporary advantages in pursuits which leave out of view the glory of God, may be gained by a seeming expediency different from adherence to the truth; but if the object sought to be promoted be the glory of God and the best interests of men, nothing will be found truly expedient except what is Scriptural. A wall might quickly be

built of considerable height, and of far enough show to the eye, by intermixing with the solid and ordinary stone a considerable proportion of wood, hay, stubble, but the building could not be very lasting, even should it escape the fire.—So might we have a church, numerous in members and adherents, and in some respects influential, by sacrificing some portions of the truth to the prepossessions and prejudices of men, by endeavouring to make the humbling doctrines of the gospel more palatable to the native pride of the human heart, and by neglecting to apply the restraints of discipline to men's conduct; but we could not expect that the glory of God, or the salvation of men would be promoted by such a church; neither could we expect that it would long maintain its position, or any temporary influence to which it might attain, even should it not be subjected to any fiery ordeal. If we sincerely wish to be instrumental in building a church of living stones that shall endure unto the end, we will diligently hold forth the whole truth, and have recourse to no methods inconsistent with that truth.

III. Our encouragement.

Though our work is arduous, and success depends not on our own will, strength or exertions, yet we have abundant encouragement to diligence and perseverance in the use of all appointed means, and

1. We have still, in all its completeness and fitness for its ends, the instrument which, in every age, has been found effectual in building up the house of God,—even his own word—the truth as it is in Jesus. The word of God is still “like as a fire, and like a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces,—and still as fitted for its work as ever,—still “quick and powerful,”—still “the sword of the Spirit:” the Scriptures of truth are still able to make men wise unto salvation: the gospel is still, and will be found the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; still powerful “in pulling down strong-holds,” and in building up the temple of the Lord.

2. The King and Head of the church, who “ascended on high, led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, yea even for the rebellious that the Lord God might dwell among them,” is still “exalted at God's right-hand a prince and Saviour.” He has all power in heaven and in earth, being King of kings and Lord of lords. And if the builders