

Declension in religion is a gradual thing. It comes stealthily upon us. There is first the day of *wavering*, when men begin to doubt the truth they had previously embraced, then the day of *supineness*, when they become weary in well doing; then the day of *looking back*, when they begin to long for the pleasures they had renounced, and then, finally, the utter estrangement of the heart from God, the sad prognostication of that everlasting severance "from the presence of the Lord and from the Glory of His Power," which will be realized in that final scene, where their choice will become their punishment, their own selection, the source of their eternal woe.

"Seeing," says the Apostle, "that ye know these things before hand, beware lest ye also," ye whom I delight to recognize as persons who have obtained the like precious faith with myself,* and whose pure minds I wish to stir up by way of remembrance,† "lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness."

And then, my Brethren, he finishes this instructive chapter, by adding a precept, which, if only acted upon by those who profess to be looking for "the new heavens and the new earth," would guard them on their way to them, and ensure their entrance at the close of their perilous journey. "But grow he says, in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

By "the grace of Christ" is meant *His favor*; and the *fruits* of that favor, those holy dispositions and internal graces in which the image of God consists; and, by "the knowledge of Christ," that spiritual discernment of the beauty and excellence of His character, the depths of His love, the riches of His grace, the fulness of His wisdom, the preciousness of His promises, and the glories of His Kingdom, which *they only* possess, whose hearts have been given to Him. And they all *do* possess them, though, in

* Chap. I. v. 1. † Chap. III. v. 1.