

GROWING UP INTO CHRIST IN ALL THINGS

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, August 3rd, 1856

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ." Ephesians 4:14, 15

In the Church of God there is unity, but not uniformity. In nature, especially in the works of creation, we see something similar. In creating the world, the great Creator seems to have prescribed for Himself certain patterns—types as they are called by naturalists—in conformity to which He has moulded the works of His hands. This type or pattern we may compare to the circumference of a circle which bounds (so to speak) God's idea; but within that circle He works in an infinite variety. The human countenance, the trees of the field, the flowers of the garden, the birds that fly in the air, the animals that walk on the ground, the very fish that swim in the sea, are all constructed each according to a certain leading type; but within that bounding circle there is an infinite variety of colour, shape, size, and form.

So it is in the dominion of grace. The Spirit of God works according to a certain outline; for there are certain grand distinguishing features of His divine operation upon the soul; but within that circle He works in various ways. He does not cut all lines to the same depth, nor even trace the patterns in exactly the same form. Look at a turner at work; there is his lathe, and there his cutting tool. Every design is cut by the same tool, and the machine worked by the same treadle; yet

what infinite variety in the execution of the patterns, and how visible in each the directing mind of the artificer!

So with the work of God upon the soul. It is the same Spirit who teaches all the election of grace, and He works by the same Word of truth, which is the cutting tool, if I may use the expression, to trace the image of Christ on the heart; and yet what a variety of experience is there in the Church of God! Can we find two Christians whose experience in all points agrees? And yet what a unity of feeling, what a oneness of heart, what a mingling of spirit, stamps all who are taught of God as really one! In this astonishing blending of the greatest variety with the greatest unity it is that we discover the hand of God, and thus trace consummate beauty and infinite wisdom.

This unity and yet variety are beautifully traced out in the chapter before us (Eph. 4). "The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" is the great thing we are called upon to endeavour to keep. And this "unity of the Spirit" results from this, that "there is one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all." But though there is this blessed oneness of body, spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and Father, not an equal measure of grace, and therefore not an equal measure of experience, knowledge, or gifts, is bestowed on all. "But unto every one of us," adds the Apostle, "is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." This leads him to show whence Christ derived these gifts, what is their nature, and for what purpose they are bestowed.

I mention these things, because our text is so closely connected with them that we cannot well understand it

unless this connection is seen. Carrying out, then, this connection, we may remark that there are three things that bear upon our text, and viewed spiritually may serve to cast a divine light upon it.

1. We are to view by the eye of faith the Lord Jesus Christ raised up from the dead by the power of the Father, and seated at God's right hand.

2. In seeing Him as seated at God's right hand, we are to view Him as having received from the Father a divine plenitude, an overflowing fulness of gifts; as we read, "When He ascended up on high He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." It is in the Psalm from which the apostle quotes (Psalm 68:18): "received gifts for men." Before He gave He received them, and received that He might give them. A store, an inexhaustible store, of gifts and graces was entrusted to, and deposited in Him, as the risen Head of the Church. They were laid up by the hand of the Father in Him, as we read (Col. 1:19): "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." The Church is therefore said to be "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (or things) in Christ;" and John tells us that "of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." We are then to view Him as sending these gifts down, as was shown in an especial manner on the day of Pentecost. And though we have now no Pentecostal effusion, or the same measure and depth of spiritual gifts and graces as was then manifested, the Holy Ghost has not ceased to work in the Church of God. The Lord Jesus, at the right hand of the Father, still continues to shed His gifts and graces upon the souls of men, still is what He was then, and will be, till He has gathered into His bosom the last vessel of mercy; for "He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

3. But there is a third feature connected with the text which it is very desirable to notice, that the gifts spoken of are especially ministerial gifts, as we find the Apostle laying down very plainly in the 11th verse: "He gave some apostles;" these were the most eminent servants of Christ, of whom there were but few in number; and these endowed with gifts to plant churches and govern them generally, with especial authority from the Lord Himself. "And some prophets;" or preachers, men not invested with the high and peculiar office of an apostle, but endowed with preaching gifts whereby they were able to edify the Church. "And some evangelists;" men who were not suited for a settled, permanent ministry; not adapted to preside over a church or people, from an absence of the proper qualifications of wisdom and firmness, or from a want of spiritual flow of matter to season their preaching with a necessary variety; but still blessed with ministerial gifts, adapting them to go from place to place preaching the simple elements of gospel truth, and their ministry blessed to the conviction of sinners and the calling in of the scattered sheep. "And some pastors;" men endowed with sufficient wisdom and ability to hold a permanent, settled situation, fitted to govern as well as feed the church committed to their care; not only able to preach the gospel with power and unction, but qualified to rule and guide the brethren with all Christian wisdom as well as affection and love. And others "teachers"; not able perhaps to preside over churches as "pastors," nor endowed with sufficient ability to go forth as "prophets," or even as "evangelists," but still able to drop a word of instruction from time to time in a small way and in a limited sphere, and thus be teachers of those who are willing to learn. Thus each man of these several ranks and orders was simply what the Lord made him; none able to boast, but each filling up that post to which the Church's risen Head had assigned him; and as long as each kept his place, blessed in his deed.

But the Apostle tells us also why these gifts were given. He says it is "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." He thus plainly teaches us that the Lord Jesus at the right hand of the Father sends these gifts down, raises up these men, furnishes them each with his several ability, and plants them at their different posts to bring about three ends: 1. "for the perfecting of the saints;" that is, that the saints of God may be matured and established in the truth and in the divine life; 2. "for the work of the ministry;" that is, that the ministry of the Word in all its various branches—whether doctrine, or reproof, or correction, or instruction in righteousness, whether to convince or console, throw down or build up—might be fully carried out; and 3. "for the edifying of the body of Christ," that the saints of God, forming the mystical body of Jesus, might be built up on their most holy faith, "till we all come"—that is, either collectively as a body or individually as members—"in the unity of the faith"—there being but "one faith"—"and of the knowledge of the Son of God"—through an experimental acquaintance with Him—"unto a perfect man"—that is, grown up and matured—"unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"—such a measure of stature as the fulness of Christ gives to make a man complete in every good word and work.

These preliminary observations may introduce us to the subject before us. "That we henceforth," says this blessed man of God, "be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth" (or as it is in the margin, "being sincere") "in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ."

In attempting, with God's blessing, to open up these words, I

shall direct your attention:

I. To that *state of religious childhood*, out of which we are by divine grace to be brought: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

II. Secondly, to *the means which God employs to bring us out of this childish state*, namely, "speaking the truth," or adopting, as I intend to do, the marginal reading, "being sincere in love."

III. And thirdly, to *the result of these means*: "That we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ."

I. The blessed Spirit has selected the figure of a little child and used it in various ways, but chiefly in two: i. He has selected certain features in a child which we may call favourable qualities, though still connected with the very imperfection of childhood; and He has used these favourable qualities as emblems of a certain state of soul spiritually corresponding with them. Again, He has taken certain (what shall we call them?) unfavourable qualities in the child, and used them as figures of instability, weakness and imperfection in the divine life. And yet the foundation of the figure in both aspects is the same; the natural tenderness, immaturity, and want of growth, which is visible in the child. Let me explain myself a little more clearly and distinctly. 1. First observe the favourable qualities which the Holy Ghost has used as emblems of certain distinctive features of divine teaching. A child is naturally simple. The tenderness of its ideas preserves it from duplicity of speech or conduct. The Holy Spirit takes this quality, and uses it as an emblem of

that spiritual simplicity and godly sincerity of which He is the author. We must become simple as little children. Again, the child is inexperienced, ignorant of many things which it has afterwards to learn, and the innate consciousness of this renders it teachable. So the child of God is teachable, willing to learn, to gather spiritual instruction where he can. The child again is humble. It knows little or nothing of worldly distinctions; the child of a peer will play with the child of a peasant as readily as with one of its own class. This external, visible humility is made a figure of that spiritual humility which clothes, or should clothe a child of God. The Lord Himself has used the figure of a little child in this point of view as simple, teachable, and humble, when He declared, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

2. But, on the other hand, there are things in a child of nature which are representatives of what is to be avoided in a child of grace. A child is inexperienced, unacquainted with the world, with business, with any serious or useful occupation, with the art and craft of men, with the way in which the battle of life is fought and won. So in grace. There is a state and stage in the divine life through which everyone passes, in which he has little experience of himself, of the evils of his heart, of the dreadful nature of sin, of the strength of temptation, of the power and subtlety of his unwearied foe; and, on the other hand, little experience of the abounding grace of Christ, of the efficacy of His atoning blood, and the manifestations of His dying love.

Again, a child is weak. Mind and body alike are naturally and necessarily feeble from its being a transition state, and neither having yet grown into their intended maturity. We can bear with this in childhood. Their very weaknesses, especially in our own children, are engaging; their very want

of maturity, like a rose-bud, or a lamb at play, has something beautiful about it. But we should not wish our children to be lambs and rose-buds all their lives. We should not like them to be dwarfs, lest haply they degenerate into idiots. We expect them, as years pass on, to grow out of this state. Were they always children, we should infer the presence of some disease. We should say there was something fundamentally wrong in their constitution, which stunted and starved their growth.

So in heavenly things. It is pleasing to see the work of grace in its first commencement on the soul. The doubts, the fears, the earnestness, the zeal, the simplicity of those in whom the Spirit of God is first at work is a sight beautiful to witness, and when seen in any near and dear to us unspeakably heart-gladdening; but we expect them to grow out of this weakness and feebleness, so as in due time to attain to a ripeness and maturity in the life of God, and not be children all their days.

Another feature of childhood is to be changeable, vacillating, pleased with a toy one day and throwing it aside the next; not knowing its own mind, but flitting like a butterfly from flower to flower. This fickle, unstable, changeable mood of a child, the blessed Spirit uses as an emblem of a similar state of mind too often visible in the professing Church of Christ.

Reproving and condemning this childish instability, he bids us "henceforth be no more children." It was well enough to be children once, for in grace as in nature none are born men, and during spiritual as during natural childhood childish ways are borne with; but we are not to be children all our days, ever vacillating, unstable, undecided, carried away by every impulse, and moved by every breath, ignorant and inexperienced, knowing little of ourselves, and less of the

Lord's mercy and love. There is a growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are, therefore, by divine teaching, to grow out of childhood into manhood, to forget those things which are behind and reach forth unto those things which are before, and thus attain to some ripeness in the life of God.

ii. But the Apostle shews not merely the weakness of a state of childhood, but the dangers to which this state is exposed: "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." He rather changes the figure here; for his heart was so full of the things of God, that like a workman with a number of tools before him, who drops the one in his hand and catches up another more suitable for a particular part of his work, he drops one figure to take up another more adapted to convey his meaning. He does not carry out the figure of childhood, but at once adopts another—that of a ship in a storm. How unstable is a ship at sea, how tossed up and down by every wave, and driven to and fro by every wind, especially if there be not much ballast in the hold! Whilst then we are in a childish, immature state in the divine life, we are like a ship at sea with little ballast, tossed to and fro by every wind that blows. Now that is a very dangerous position, because if the ship have not a good amount of ballast in the hold, it is liable to be capsized, founder, and go down in the deep waters. Not that the child of God can or will go down in the deep waters; his soul, his immortal soul cannot be lost. The ship itself may not founder, yet much of the cargo may be lost, the passengers get wetted, and their clothes and goods spoiled. So we, from instability and inexperience, like a lightly ballasted ship in a stormy sea, may, without losing our souls, lose much of our comfort and peace; and if we escape drowning, may not escape a thorough good wetting.

But there is something striking in the expression, "tossed to and fro." Here, on one side, is an iron-bound coast, full of rocks; and on the other, the raging sea. Now the ship may be sometimes tossed "to"—approach the iron-bound coast, and be in imminent danger of being dashed to pieces—and then a contrary wind may suddenly carry it away "from" the rocks, and drive it out half a wreck into the wild, stormy ocean. So in divine matters. Here on one side are rocks—deadly heresies, dangerous speculations, fundamental errors upon grand cardinal points: the Trinity, the Sonship of Christ, the personality and work of the Holy Ghost. Errors of this sort are as sunken rocks lying abreast of the homeward track. Suddenly a wind comes from some preacher or author that catches the sails of an unstable ship, and drives it headlong to these sunken rocks, for errors and heresies thickly line the spiritual coast. But just as the vessel is coming upon the rocks, a land breeze springs up, a gust of despair or some sudden fear and terror, and away it goes right into the boundless sea. Many even of the saints of God, when not established in the truth, are thus "tossed to and fro"; driven sometimes almost upon the rocks of destructive error, and thence hurled back into a stormy sea, where terror stands on the deck, and despair rides upon the wave. How many, who one would hope fear God, are thus tossed to and fro! They wander from chapel to chapel, from minister to minister, from book to book, and can scarcely tell who are right and who are wrong, who are the servants of God and who the servants of pride and self; sometimes taken with this man and then with that man; lifted up and carried about with every new scheme and every fresh doctrine that wears an air of plausibility; hurled sometimes well nigh on the shoals of error, and then driven away to sea without compass or pilot. How many are thus "carried about" all round the compass, "with every wind of doctrine"! No minister can long please them; no people long satisfy them; no doctrine long hold

them. They change their place of worship as worldly people their watering place, and love new faces and new voices as much as seaside visitors love new sights and new seas.

iii. But the Apostle adds a remarkable expression: "By the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." He opens a wonderful depth here. It strikes me sometimes with astonishment when I read the Epistles, to see that in those early days, when the power of Christ was so manifest, and men had to carry their lives in their hands, there were such errors and heresies in the Church. Yet I see the wisdom of God in permitting it. There were then men of God, such as the apostles, who could point them out and write down the truth, the living truth of God, under the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and thus set up a certain standard, and fix unerring landmarks for the Church of Christ for all time.

This tossing to and fro results, the Apostle says, from "the sleight of men." The original here is exceedingly expressive, or I would not mention it. The word translated "sleight" means literally, cheating at dice; the allusion being to the practice of gamblers loading the dice to obtain a favourable throw. I never saw it done myself, but I speak from what I have read. The dice are rightly marked and rightly thrown, but being loaded on one side, they always come up in favour of the cheat who throws them. So errors and heresies resemble loaded dice. They look all right, properly marked with texts and passages, and the minister or writer seems to throw them fully and fairly down before the people. And yet, like loaded dice, there is jugglery and deception at the bottom. As in sleight of hand, things are made to appear what they are not, so jugglers and cheats in religion deceive people by a show of piety and holiness, under the cover of which they hide the most destructive errors. Books,

apparently very religious, but filled with infidelity, lie on every railway stall; Jesuits, male and female, creep into families and schools as tutors and governesses, masters and mistresses, to entangle the young with Popish wiles; Puseyites, with the Church of England in their mouth, and the Church of Rome in their heart, steal from house to house undermining all Protestant principles. The friends of truth are asleep, and the enemies awake; simple souls are caught, but still the game goes on. Yet of all gamblers, religious gamblers are the worst, for the throw is for eternity, and the soul is at stake.

iv. But the Apostle uses another expression of great pith and power: "cunning craftiness." The word means literally, "the unprincipled conduct of a designing wretch, who will do any thing to gain his ends." Such is the nature of error, that when once a man's mind becomes thoroughly imbued with it, he cannot rest, but as he propagates it. The man who holds error is sure to be ten times firmer in that error than many a child of God is in truth. Amazing, too, is the "cunning craftiness" of these erroneous men, "whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Though so deeply fixed in their errors, yet there is in them an instinctive consciousness that their views will not bear the light, and that the verdict of God's people is against them. "The righteous is as bold as a lion," but they are as crafty as a serpent. They therefore lie in wait, "as a serpent by the way, as an adder in the path." David describes them well. "He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages; in the secret places doth he murder the innocent; his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly, as a lion in his den. He lieth in wait to catch the poor; he doth catch the poor when he draweth him into his net" (Psalm 10:8, 9). Their delight is to catch some simple-hearted child of God, and under a show of deep experience, or wonderful manifestation, instil their poisonous errors into

his ear and heart. Thus "they lie in wait to deceive," or, as the words may be rendered, they pursue a systematic plan of deception, laying schemes to entrap the unwary, and are never so much pleased as when they can beguile an unstable soul into their net.

II. Now, how are we to be preserved from these dangers? If we remain always children, we shall not only be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, but run imminent hazard of being juggled into error by these dicers in religion, entrapped into some heresy by these crafty deceivers. A child playing with a gambler has small chance of winning; an unstable soul arguing with a crafty heretic is more likely to be beaten than to beat. What, then, is our safeguard? To be "sincere in love." I adopt, you will perceive, the marginal reading. It is more literal, and throws more light upon the passage. We have not a word in our language to convey the exact meaning. If I might coin a word for a moment, I would render it "truthing it"; that is, being truthful throughout—not merely truthful in speech, but in heart and life. "To speak the truth" is but the fruit; to be truthful or sincere is to possess the root. Nor is it the truthful lip, but the truthful heart that preserves from the sleight of men and the cunning craftiness of unprincipled deceivers. Sincerity lies at the root of all gracious profession. If a man be not sincere he is nothing. God makes a man sincere by planting His truth in his heart; and whenever God does make a man sincere, the truth which He has implanted will grow. Truth does not lie in a man's soul dead and motionless, like a stone in Gower Street; it is a living, active, expansive principle. If the truth be in the soul it will be ever pushing out error, because the two principles cannot exist together; and as Isaac thrust out Ishmael, and Jacob proved stronger than Esau, so will simplicity and godly sincerity be ever mightier than craft and deception. The truth of God in the heart will not wither and die, but will be shined

upon by the sun of righteousness, and sunned into fruitfulness by the smiles of God; and as truth becomes day by day more and more precious, so will error and evil become day by day more and more hateful. A sincere soul stands "girt about with truth," and truth forms its shield and buckler.

But how does this Christian sincerity prove the soul's safeguard from error? By putting it ever on the watch tower, looking out and looking up for the teaching of God and the light of His countenance. A soul made spiritually sincere takes nothing upon trust, requires the seal of God on all it receives, and the witness of the Spirit to all that it feels. As a modest female is preserved by her modesty from the very approach of the seducer, her retiring sensitiveness forming her truest, her most impenetrable protection, so the very sincerity of an honest soul is its best safeguard from error. He who is sincere sees the rocks ahead, on which others concerning faith make shipwreck; and being well ballasted with temptations, afflictions and trials, he is not easily tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. His desire to be right keeps him right; his fear to be wrong preserves him from wrong. Knowing the worth of his soul, he will not sit down with religious dicers and gamblers to stake it upon the throw of their loaded dice; and as he walks warily and cautiously, he is not easily bitten by the adder in the hedge, or caught by the cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive. The light of God in his soul makes him see; the life of God in his heart makes him feel; the fear of God in his conscience makes him honest; the love of God in his affections makes him love; and all this gives truth that firm place in him that there is no room for error. The Apostle adds, therefore, "in love." It is not enough to be "sincere"; we must be "sincere in love." Mark that. It is not receiving God's truth as a certain orderly system; it is not furnishing our heads with a sound

doctrinal creed and compact Calvinistic scheme which will avail us in the trying hour; but it is to have the truth of God brought into our soul by a divine power, and realising such unutterable sweetness in it as communicates a firm abiding love, both to the truth itself, and to Him of whom it testifies and from whom it comes. It is thus we are made "sincere in love." The fear of God creates the sincerity, the application of the truth with power creates the love to it. And when we are thus made "sincere in love," we are brought out of the childish state in which we are carried about with every wind of doctrine, and in danger of being entrapped by the cunning craft of every deceiver. We know the truth, love the truth, and become established in the truth.

The soul's best, truest safeguard is love. The Apostle tells us why men "perish in all deceivableness of unrighteousness." It is because "they receive not the love of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:10). They fall into error because they never really loved the truth which they professed. The truth, when known by Divine teaching, makes free not only from guilt and bondage, but also from evil and error. Once love the truth, and error never more can have a place in your heart.

III. But I was to show you what would be *the end and blessed result*: "That we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ." We have to grow up into Christ, and we cannot do this except we grow out of self. Self, sin, and the world are three deadly enemies to growth in Christ. Where self-righteousness or self-indulgence, self-conceit or self-dependence, or in whatever other form self may come, it is a deadly enemy to growth in grace.

There are two things we must ever be afraid of, error and evil. As the truth of God gets possession of your soul it displaces error and subdues evil. We learn to abhor them,

and cannot willingly take such wretches into our bosom. Truth is like a person naturally clean and nice in his person, dress, and habits; he cannot endure anything that is not clean also. Error and evil are like the filthy tramp, never so happy as in his dirt; scissors and soap his intense abhorrence. As then truth is loved, error is hated; as Christ is made precious, sin is abhorred. Thus, by the love of truth, the soul grows out of self in all its manifold forms, and becomes conformed, in its measure, to the image of its blessed Master. He is now no more a child, tossed to and fro, but a man in Christ. He stands firm in the gospel of Christ, because he has received the love of the truth, and the truth has made him free. It has been applied to his heart with divine power. He has tasted, felt and handled its sweetness and blessedness. Self sinks, error is spurned, evil is abhorred, the world—at least as to its alluring charms—forsaken, an experimental knowledge is obtained of the Son of God, and thus he grows up into Christ in all things in faith, in hope, in love, in union and communion, in obedience and in conformity.

Here we see the blessedness of a Gospel ministry; for if you read the connection of the text you will clearly see that it is closely associated with the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, the edifying of the body of Christ. Those, therefore, who despise a Gospel ministry, only write themselves down ignorant. No child of God who has ever been blessed under a Gospel ministry can despise it. It is, in the hands of God, a means of building up the Church, and by its instrumentality the Holy Spirit brings the saints out of their childish state into the maturity of the Christian life.

The great want of to-day is a Gospel ministry of this nature. We want men who can preach the Gospel as it was preached in days of old, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven;

and owing to this, in a measure, it is that many of God's dear saints are tossed to and fro all their days.

This growth we may view as threefold: 1. The growth of the mystical body of Christ considered as a whole. The body of Christ may be considered incomplete until all the members are brought out into their decreed position. "In Thy book all My members were written when as yet there was none of them." The members were written in the book of life before one of them came into actual being; but until those that are lying in the womb of time come forth into actual and spiritual manifestation, the body lacks a part of its full completion. The accession, therefore, of every regenerated soul to the Church of Christ is an accession to its growth. As a building grows by the addition of stone after stone, so the continual addition of living stones makes the spiritual building grow "unto a holy temple in the Lord."

2. Another growth is the growth of a Gospel church; and this growth is twofold—the growth from without, by the goodly addition of godly members; and the growth from within, by the goodly increase of godly fruit. And these usually go together. A decaying church dies gradually in the branches, from the necessary bereavements it sustains and the non-addition of godly members; and dies gradually at the same time at the root by the decay of the life of God within. The two things go together. A church dying at the root pushes forth no fresh branches, and gradually becomes a withered trunk; whilst a church with life in the root is ever pushing forth living branches.

3. The third growth is of the believer individually, when he goes forth and grows up as a calf of the stall.

Blessed is it when the body of Christ as a whole—a Gospel

church as an integral part of that whole and individual believers as members of Christ, are thus growing up into Him in all things—in knowledge, in faith, in love, in obedience, and in conformity to His image and example. Blessed is it when they grow in humility, godly fear, deadness to the world, submission to His Word and will, separation from evil, spirituality of mind, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, love and liberality to the saints, simplicity and godly sincerity, prayerfulness and watchfulness; in a word, in every Christian fruit and heavenly grace. To grow up into Christ in all things is the sum and substance of vital godliness.

I have spoken feebly and imperfectly, for there is a depth of truth in this passage which I feel to exhaust all my powers to speak of adequately. I have, therefore, merely given you a few fragmentary thoughts, though I have been purposely brief on the last head, as hoping to pursue the subject this evening. But may the Lord bless them to your souls, supply all my deficiency, and lead you into the truth for yourselves. Meditate upon these things. Pray that the Lord would establish them in your heart and conscience, that you may see the blessedness and beauty of them, and be led by the Spirit of God, who alone can lead you into all truth. The Lord give His blessing, and crown with His own heavenly dew and sacred unction what has been spoken in His Name.