

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

RIPE FRUIT.

A Sermon

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“My soul desired the first ripe fruit.”—Micah vii. 1.

THE nation of Israel had fallen into so sad and backsliding a condition, that it was not like a vine covered with fruit, but like a vineyard after the whole vintage has been gathered, so that there was not to be found a single cluster. Not one righteous man could be found, not one to be trusted or found faithful to God. The whole state had become like a field that has been closely reaped, in which nothing remains but the stubble; like a vineyard that has been completely stripped, in which there remains no vestige of fruit. The prophet, speaking in the name of Israel, desired the first ripe fruits, but there were none to be had. The lesson of the text, as it stands, would be that good men are the best fruit of a nation, they make it worth while that the nation should exist, they are the salt which preserves it, they are the fruit which adorns it and blesses it. Pray we then for our country, that God will continually raise up a righteous seed, a faithful band, who, for his name's sake, shall be a sweet savour unto God, for whose sake he may bless the whole land.

But I mean to take our text out of its connection, and use it as the heading of a discourse upon *ripeness in grace*. I think we can all use the words of Micah in another sense, and say, “My soul desired the first ripe fruit.” We would not be merely the green blade, we desire to be the full corn in the ear; we would not merely show forth the blossoms of repentance and the young buds of struggling faith, but we would go on to maturity, and bring forth fruit unto perfection, to the honour and praise of Jesus Christ.

This morning, then, I speak about ripeness in grace, maturity in the divine life, fruit ready to be gathered: and our first point shall be *the marks of this ripeness*; the second, *the causes that work together to create this ripeness*; the third, *the desirability of the ripeness*; the fourth, *the solemnity of the whole subject*.

I. First, then, let us speak upon THE MARKS OF RIPENESS IN GRACE.

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Let us begin with the mark of *beauty*. There is a great beauty in a fruit tree when it is in bloom. Perhaps there is no more lovely object in all nature than the apple blossom; but this beauty soon fades—one shower of rain, one descent of hail, one puff of the north wind, and very soon the blossoms fall like snow; and if they remain their full time, speedily indeed in any case they must withdraw from view. Much loveliness adorns youthful piety. The love of his espousals, his first love, his first zeal, all make the newborn believer comely. Can anything be more delightful than our first graces? Even God himself delights in the beauty of the blossoming believer. "I remember thee," saith he, "the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness." Autumn has a more sober aspect, but still it rivals the glory of spring. Ripe fruit has its own peculiar beauty. As the fruit ripens, the sun tints it with surpassing loveliness, and the colours deepen till the beauty of the fruit is equal to the beauty of the blossom, and in some respects is superior. What a delicacy of bloom there is upon the grape, the peach, the plum, when they have attained perfection! Nature far excels art, and all the attempts of the modeller in wax cannot reach the marvellous blendings of colour, the matchless tints of the ripe fruit, worthy of Eden before the fall. It is another sort of beauty altogether from that of the blossom, yielding to the eye of the husbandman, who has the care of the garden, a fairer sight by far. The perfumed bloom yields in value to the golden apple, even as promise is surpassed by fulfilment. The blossom is painted by the pencil of hope, but the fruit is dyed in the hue of enjoyment. There is in ripe Christians the beauty of realised sanctification, which the word of God knows by the name of "the beauty of holiness." This consecration to God, this setting apart for his service, this watchful avoidance of evil, this careful walking in integrity, this dwelling near to God, this being made like unto Christ—in a word, this beauty of holiness is one of the surest emblems of maturity in grace. You have no ripe fruit if you are not holy, if still your passions are unsubdued, if still you are carried about by every wind of temptation. If still, "Lo here, and lo there," will attract you to the right hand and to the left, you have not reached to anything like maturity; perhaps you are not even fruit unto God at all. But where holiness is perfected in the fear of God, and the Christian is at least striving after perfect holiness, and aiming to be conformed to the image of Christ, one of the marks of the ripe fruit is plainly present.

Another mark is never absent in a mature believer—namely, the *weight* which is evidenced in *humility*. Look at the corn in the field, it holds its head erect while it is green, but when the ear is filled and matured, it hangs its head in graceful humbleness. Look at your fruit trees, how their blossoming branches shoot up towards the sky, but when they begin to be loaded with fruit, since the riper the fruit the greater its weight, the branch begins to bow, until it needs oftentimes to be propped up and to be supported, lest it break away from the stem. Weight comes with maturity, lowliness of mind is the inevitable consequence. Growing Christians think themselves nothing, full-grown Christians know that they are less than nothing. The nearer we are to heaven in point of sanctification, the more we mourn our infirmities,

and the humbler is our estimate of ourselves. Lightly laden vessels float high in the water, heavy cargo sinks the barque to the water's edge. The more grace, the more the need of grace is felt. He may boast of his grace who has none, he may talk much of his grace who has little, but he who is rich in grace cries out for more, and forgets that which is behind. When a man's inward life flows like a river, he thinks only of the source, and cries before his God, "All my fresh springs are in thee." He who abounds in holiness feels more than ever that in him, that is in his flesh, there dwelleth no good thing. Thou art not ripened, my brother, whilst thou hast a high esteem of thyself. He who glories in himself is but a babe in Christ, if indeed he be in Christ at all. When thou shalt see death written on the creature, and see all thy life in Christ; when thou shalt perceive even thy holy things to have iniquity in them, and see all thy perfectness in him who is altogether lovely; when thou shalt lie prostrate at the foot of the throne, and only rise to sit and reign in him who is thine all, then art thou ripening, but not till then.

Another mark of ripeness which every one perceives in fruit, and by which indeed the maturity of many fruits is tested, is *tenderness*. The young green fruit is hard and stone-like; but the ripe fruit is soft, yields to pressure, can almost be moulded, retains the mark of the finger. So is it with the mature Christian, he is noted for tenderness of spirit. Beloved, I think if I must miss any good thing, I would give up many of the graces if I might possess very much tenderness of spirit. I am persuaded that many Christians violate the delicacy of their consciences, and therein lose much of true excellence. Do you not remember, my brother, when you used to be afraid to put one foot before another for fear you should tread in the wrong place?—I wish we always felt in that same manner. You recollect when you were afraid to open your mouth lest perhaps you should say something that would grieve the Spirit!—I would we were always so self-diffident. "Open thou my lips"—I am afraid to open them myself—"Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise." An extreme delicacy concerning sin should be cultivated by us all. When the believer can listen to a song with a lascivious tone, and does not feel himself indignant, let him be indignant with himself. When he can come across sin and feel that it does not shock him as once it did, let him be shocked to think that his conscience is being so seared. I would give you for a prayer that verse from Wesley's hymn—

"Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make,
Awake my heart, when sin is nigh
And keep it still awake."

The sensitive plant as soon as it is touched begins to fold up its leaves; touch it again, and the little branchlets droop, until at last it stands like the bare poles of a vessel, all its sail of leaf is furled, and it seems as if it would, if it could, shrink into nothing to avoid your hand. So should you be, so should I be, tender to the touch of sin, so as to say with the psalmist, "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law." Such tenderness is a prominent mark

of ripeness, and it should be exhibited, not only in relation to sin, but in other ways. We should manifest tenderness towards the gospel—glad to hear it, thankful even for a little of it; glad to eat the crumbs from the Master's table; tenderness towards Christ, so that the heart doth leap at the sound of his name, tenderness towards the motions of the Spirit, so as to be guided by his eye. The Spirit often, I doubt not, comes to us and we do not perceive him, because we are heavy of hearing, we are dull of understanding. The photographer may place his plate in the camera, and the object to be taken may be long before it, and well focussed, too, and yet no impression may be produced; but when the plate is made sensitive, thoroughly sensitive, then it receives the image at once. O that your heart and mine might be sensitive to receive the impression of the Holy Spirit, so that on us there shall be printed at once the mind and will of God. Dear friend, bear this in thy memory, and forget not that it shall be a token of thy ripeness when the hardness is departing, when the heart of stone is being supplanted by the heart of flesh, and when the soul yields promptly to the presence of Christ, and the touch of his Spirit.

Another mark of ripeness is *sweetness*, as well as tenderness. The unripe fruit is sour, and perhaps it ought to be, or else we should eat all the fruits while they were yet green. If pears and apples had the same flavour when they are but small, as afterwards, I am sure where there are children, very few of them would come to their full development. It may, therefore, be in the order of grace a fit thing that in the youthful Christian some sharpness should be found which will ultimately be removed. There are certain graces which are more martial and warlike than others, and have their necessary uses—these we may expect to see more in the young men than in the fathers; and they will be toned down by experience. As we grow in grace, we are sure to grow in charity, sympathy, and love; we shall have greater and more intense affection for the person of "Him whom having not seen we love;" we shall have greater delight in the precious things of his gospel; the doctrine which perhaps we did not understand at first, will become marrow and fatness to us as we advance in grace. We shall feel that there is honey dropping from the honey-comb in the deeper truths of our religion. We shall, as we ripen in grace, have greater sweetness towards our fellow Christians. Bitter-spirited Christians may know a great deal, but they are immature. Those who are quick to censure may be very acute in judgment, but they are as yet very immature in heart. He who grows in grace remembers that he is but dust, and he therefore does not expect his fellow Christians to be anything more; he overlooks ten thousand of their faults, because he knows his God overlooks twenty thousand in his own case. He does not expect perfection in the creature, and, therefore, he is not disappointed when he does not find it. As he has sometimes to say of himself, "This is my infirmity," so he often says of his brethren, "This is their infirmity;" and he does not judge them as he once did. I know we who are young beginners in grace think ourselves qualified to reform the whole Christian church. We drag her before us, and condemn her straightway; but when our virtues become more mature, I trust we shall not be more tolerant of evil, but we shall

be more tolerant of infirmity, more hopeful for the people of God, and certainly less arrogant in our criticisms. Sweetness towards sinners is another sign of ripeness; when the Christian loves the souls of men; when he feels that there is nothing in the world which he cares for so much as endeavouring to bring others to a knowledge of the saving truth; when he can lay himself out for sinners, bear with their ill-manners, bear with anything, so that he might but lead them to the Saviour—then is the man mature in grace. God grant this sweetness to us all. A holy calm, cheerfulness, patience, a walk with God, fellowship with Jesus, an anointing from the Holy One—I put all these together, and I call them sweetness, heavenly lusciousness, full-flavouredness of Christ. May this be in you and abound.

I hope I shall not weary you with these marks and signs, I shall not if you can find them in yourselves. *Fulness*, again, is the mark of ripeness, seen when the fruit is plumped out and arrived at its fair and full proportions. The man in Christ Jesus has a fulness of grace. As he advances in the divine life, all the graces which were in him at his new birth are strengthened and revealed. I suppose that in the newly-formed ear of wheat all the kernels are present, but they are not yet manifested; as the ear advances to maturity these grains begin to solidify and become more full. So with the believer; there is repentance in him, but not such repentance as he will have as he sees more clearly the love of Christ in pardoning his sin. There is faith in him certainly, but not such faith as he shall have when afterwards he shall boldly declare, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him." There is joy in him at the very first, but not the joy which he will possess when he will rejoice in the Lord always, and yet again rejoice. Experience deepens that which was there before. Young Christians have the first draughts, the outline of the image of Christ, but as they grow in grace there comes the filling up, the colouring, the laying on of the deeper tints, the bringing out of the whole picture. This it is to grow mature—when we know whom we have believed by acquaintance with him, when we know sin by having struggled with it, when we know the faithfulness of God by having proved it, when we know the preciousness of the promise by having received it, and having it fulfilled in our own souls—this it is to be a ripe Christian, to be full of grace and truth like our Master.

Only one other mark of ripeness, and a very sure one, is *a loose hold of earth*. Ripe fruit soon parts from the bough. You shake the tree and the ripest apples fall. If you wish to eat fresh fruit you put out your hand to pluck it, and if it comes off with great difficulty you feel you had better leave it alone a little longer; but when it drops into your hand, quite ready to be withdrawn from the branch, you know it to be in good condition. When like Paul we can say, "I am ready to depart," when we set loose by all earthly things, oh, then it is that we are ripe for heaven. You should measure your state of heart by your adhesiveness or your resignation in reference to the things of this world. You have some comforts here, some of you have money, and you look upon them, and you feel "it were hard to part with these"—this is green fruit; when your grace is mature, you will feel that though God should give you even

greater abundance of this world, you are still an exile longing for the better land. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? There is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." This is the mature believer's question. His song often is—

"My heart is with him on his throne,
And ill can brook delay;
Each moment listening for the voice,
'Rise up and come away.'"

It is a sure token of ripeness when you are standing on tiptoe, with your wings outspread, ready for flight; when no chain any longer binds you further to earth; when your love to things below is subordinate to your longing for the joys above. Oh! it is sweet to sing with Dr. Watts—

"Father, I long, I faint to see
The place of thine abode;
I'd leave thine earthly courts, and flee
Up to thy seat, my God."

When we get to this in our very hearts, we are getting ripe, and we shall soon be gathered. The Master will not let his ripe fruit hang long on the tree. Thus I have given you the marks of ripeness.

II. Briefly, brethren, let us notice THE CAUSES OF THIS RIPENESS. So gracious a result must have a gracious cause.

The first cause of ripeness in grace is *the inward working of the sap*. The fruit could never be ripe in its raw state were it taken away from the bough. Outward agencies alone may produce rottenness, but not ripeness; sun, shower, what not, all would fail—it is the vital sap within the tree that perfects the fruit. It is especially so in grace. Dear brother, are you one with Christ, are you sure you are? Are you sure your profession is connected with vital godliness? Is Jesus Christ formed within you? Do you abide in him? If not, you need not think about maturity in grace, you had need to do your first works and repent, and turn unto him. Everything between hell and heaven which denotes salvation, is the work of the Spirit of God, and the work of the grace of Jesus. You not only cannot begin to live the Christian life, but you cannot continue in it except as the Holy Ghost enables you. That blessed Spirit, flowing to us from Christ, as he is the former of the first blossom, so he is the producer of the fruit, and is the ripener of it until it is gathered into the heavenly garner. Vitally endowed within you must be. Your sacraments, your attendance at a place of worship, your outward bowings of the knee in prayer, these are all vanity and less than nothing, unless there be this vital sap of the inward, spiritual grace.

When truth is present in the hidden part, outer influences help.

Fruit is ripened by the sun. His beams impart or produce in the fruit its perfectness of flavour. Sunless skies cause tasteless fruit. How sweetly Christians grow when they walk in the light of God's countenance! What a ripening influence the love of Jesus Christ has on the soul! When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, how rapidly the Christian advances! I believe we ripen in grace more in ten minutes when we live near to God than we might do in ten years of absence from his presence. Some fruit on a tree will not ripen fast, it is shielded from the sun. We have seen the cottagers pluck off the leaves from their vines in our chilly climate, in order to let the sun get at the vine, and bring out the colour and ripeness of the clusters; even thus the great Husbandman takes away many of the leaves of worldly comfort from us, that the comfort of his own dear presence may come at us, and ripen us for himself. We cannot have too much joy in the Lord, we cannot get too near to him. We may well sing—

“When wilt thou come unto me, Lord?
O come, my Lord, most dear!
Come near, come nearer, nearer still,
I'm blest when thou art near.”

The joy of the Lord is your strength, and the joy of the Lord is your perfectness.

Still, brethren, the fruit is no doubt equally ripened, though not as evidently so, by the shower and by the dew. All heat and no moisture, and there must be scarcely any fruit. So the dew of God's Spirit falling upon us, the constant shower of grace visiting us, and what if I add, even the trials and troubles of life, which are like showers to us—all these teach us by experience, and by experience we ripen for the skies. Some fruit I have heard of, especially the sycamore fig, never will ripen except it be bruised. It was the trade of Amos to be a bruiser of sycamore figs; they were struck with a long staff, and then after being wounded, they sweetened. How like to many of us! How many, many of us seem as if we never would be sweet till first we have been dipped in bitterness; never would be perfected till we have been smitten! We may trace many of our sharp trials, our bereavements, and our bodily pains, to the fact that we are such sour fruit, nothing will ripen us but heavy blows. Blessed be the Lord that he does not spare us. We would be ripe even if we be struck again and again. We cannot be content to continue in our sourness and immaturity; therefore, we meekly bless him that he will strike us, and make us ripe.

One idea I would correct before I pass from this—it is the notion that ripeness in grace is the necessary result of age. It is not so at all. Little children have been ripe for glory; ay, there have been authentic cases of their ripeness for heaven even at three years of age—strange

things dying babes have said of Christ, and deeply experimental things too. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings" the Lord not only brings childlike praise, but he has "perfected praise," or, as David has it, "Thou hast ordained strength because of thine enemies." Many an aged Christian is not an experienced Christian, for his experience, though it may be the experience of a Christian, may not have been Christian experience of an advanced kind. An old sailor who has never left the river is not an experienced mariner. An old soldier who never saw a battle is no veteran. Remember it is in the kingdom of God very much as it is with God himself, one day may be as a thousand years. God can, as Solomon tells us, give subtlety to the simple, and teach the young man knowledge and discretion. Years with grace will produce greater maturity, but what I want to say is, that years without grace will produce no such maturity. The mere lapse of time will not advance us in the divine life. We do not ripen necessarily because our years fulfil their tale, grey hairs and great grace are not inseparable companions. Time may be wasted as well as improved, we may be petrified rather than perfected by the flow of years. Here it may be well to note that there is no reason why a young Christian should not make great advance towards this maturity, even while young. The Lord's grace is independent of time and age; the Holy Spirit is not limited by youth, nor restrained by fewness of days. Young Samuel may excel aged Eli; a holy babe is riper than a backsliding man. Timothy was more mature than Diotrephes. Jesus can lead you, my youthful brother, to high degrees of fellowship with himself; he can make you to be a blessing even while yet you are young; I pray you aspire to the nearest place to Jesus, and like young John, lie in the Master's bosom. Truly, the aged have the help of experience, and in any case they deserve our reverent esteem, but let neither old nor young imagine that the merely natural fact of age has any influence in the spiritual life. God's work is the same in old and young, and owes nothing to the merely natural vigour of youth, or equally natural prudence of age.

III. Thus we have given you the causes of ripeness; briefly let us show you THE DESIRABILITY OF RIPENESS IN GRACE.

It is needful to dwell on this head, because many Christians appear to think that if they are just believers, it is enough. We do not in business think it enough if we barely escape bankruptcy. A man does not say, if his dear child has been ill in bed for years, that it is quite enough so long as the child is alive. We do not think that of our own bodies, that so long as we can breathe it is enough. If any one were dragged out of the Serpentine and life was just in him, we should not feel it sufficient to discover the vital spark and there leave it. No, we pursue the processes of

resuscitation till the person is perfectly restored. To be just alive as a Christian is horrid work. It is a poor state to be in to be always trying to see whether we are alive, by putting the looking glass of evidences to the lips to see if there is just a trace of gracious vapour on the surface. It is a dolorous thing to be always groaning—

“’Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or am I not?”

Yet too many are content to continue in this ignominious condition. Brethren, it is desirable that you should get out of it, and come to ripeness in grace by God’s Spirit, for, first, ultimate ripeness is an index of the health of your soul. The fruit which under proper circumstances does not ripen is not a good fruit, it must be an unwholesome production. Your soul can surely not be as it should be if it does not ripen under the influence of God’s love and the work of his grace. The gardener’s reward is the ripe fruit. You desire that Christ should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied, think you will he find that satisfaction in sour grapes? Is he to find his recompense in griping apples? No, sir; the gardener wants the mature productions of the soil, and he does not count that he has a return for his labour till he gathers ripe fruit. Let the Redeemer find ripe fruit in you. Say you with the spouse, “Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.” Endeavour to imitate her when she said, “At our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O beloved.” Present yourself to him, and may he present you to the Father, made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light!

It is the ripe fruit which proves the excellence of the tree. The tree may bear a name in very good repute, but if the fruit never ripens, very soon the gardener will remove it from the orchard. The church’s repute among wise men, is gained not from her raw and green members, but from her ripe believers—these are they by whose steadfast holiness those whose verdict is worth the having will be ruled. I would have men compelled to own that the church is a goodly vine, and her fruit most pleasant to the taste.

To break the metaphor, the church wants mature Christians very greatly, and especially when there are many fresh converts added to it. New converts furnish impetus to the church, but her backbone and substance must, under God, lie with the mature members. We want mature Christians in the army of Christ, to play the part of veterans, to inspire the rest with coolness, courage, and steadfastness; for if the whole army is made up of raw recruits the tendency will be

for them to waver when the onslaught is fiercer than usual. The old guard, the men who have breathed smoke and eaten fire before, do not waver when the battle rages like a tempest, they can die but they cannot surrender. When they hear the cry of "Forward," they may not rush to the front so nimbly as the younger soldiers, but they drag up the heavy artillery, and their advance once made is secure. They do not reel when the shots fly thick, but still hold their own, for they remember former fights when Jehovah covered their heads. The church wants in these days of flimsiness and timeserving, more decided, thorough-going, well-instructed, and confirmed believers. We are assailed by all sorts of new doctrines. The old faith is attacked by so-called reformers, who would reform it all away. I expect to hear tidings of some new doctrine once a week. So often as the moon changes, some prophet or other is moved to propound a new theory, and believe me, he will contend more valiantly for his novelty than ever he did for the gospel. The discoverer thinks himself a modern Luther, and of his doctrine he thinks as much as David of Goliath's sword, "There is none like it." As Martin Luther said of certain in his day, these inventors of new doctrines stare at their discoveries like a cow at a new gate, as if there were nothing else in all the world but the one thing for them to stare at. We are all expected to go mad for their fashions, and march to their piping. To whom we give place; no, not for an hour. They may muster a troop of raw recruits, and lead them whither they would, but for confirmed believers they sound their bugles in vain. Children run after every new toy; any little performance in the street, and the boys are all agog, gaping at it; but their fathers have work to do abroad, and their mothers have other matters at home; your drum and whistle will not draw them out. For the solidity of the church, for her steadfastness in the faith, for her defence against the constantly recurring attacks of heretics and infidels, and for her permanent advance and the seizing of fresh provinces for Christ, we want not only your young, hot blood, which may God always send to us, for it is of immense service, and we cannot do without it, but we need also the cool, steady, well-disciplined, deeply-experienced hearts of men who know by experience the truth of God, and hold fast what they have learned in the school of Christ. May the Lord our God therefore send us many such; they are wanted.

IV. And now I shall close by calling your attention to **THE GREAT SOLEMNITY OF THE SUBJECT.**

We have tried to treat it pleasantly, and to instruct after the Master's example by parables, but there is much of weight here, much of deep and solemn weight. The first is to me, to you, professor of the faith of Christ, a solemn question, am I ripening? I recollect when a child seeing on the mantel-piece a stone apple, wonderfully like an apple, too,

and very well coloured. I saw that apple years after, but it was no riper. It had been in unfavourable circumstances for softening and sweetening, if it ever would have become mellow; but I do not think if the sun of the Equator had shone on it, or if the dews of Hermon had fallen on it, it would ever have been fit to be brought to table. Its hard marble substance would have broken a giant's teeth. It was a hypocritical professor, a hard-hearted mocker of little children, a mere mimic of God's fruits. There are church members who used to be unkind, covetous, censorious, bad tempered, egotistical, everything that was hard and stony; are they so now? Have they not mellowed with the lapse of years? No, they are worse if anything; very dogs in the house for snapping and snarling, rending and devouring; great men at hewing down the carved work of the sanctuary with their axes, or at filling up wells and marring good pieces of land with stones. When the devil wants a stone to fling at a minister he is sure to use one of them. Well, now, are these people Christians at all? Are they? Let your senses exercise themselves. I leave you each one to judge. If these be extreme cases, let me ask, are there not many in whom ripeness is certainly not very apparent? No growing downwards in humility, no growing upwards in fellowship with God, no doing more, no giving more, no loving more, no praying more, no praising more, no sympathising more. Are you, then, a fruit unto God at all? Solemn question! I put it to myself as in the sight of God, and I ask you to do the same to yourselves.

Another question also rises up. There is constantly going on in every man, specially in every professed Christian, some process or other, and I believe that one of two processes will go on in us—the one is ripening, the other is rotting. Now rotting and ripening are exceedingly like each other in appearance up to a certain stage. You will sometimes find upon your tree a fruit which seems perfectly ripe, and has all the signs of ripeness a month before the proper time, outstripping thus all the other fruit. You must not think it is ripe. Cut it open, there is a worm inside. That noxious worm is to all appearance producing the same effect as the blessed sun and dew. So the worm of secret sin will eat out the heart of a professor, and yet it will outwardly produce in him the same savouriness of speech, the same apparent sanctity of life, which the Holy Spirit truly produces in a real Christian, but still the fair outside conceals a foul interior. The whitewashed sepulchre is full of decay. That fruit which mimics ripeness is rotten, leave it alone, and it will soon be a thing fit only for the dunghill. My dear friends, I have lived long enough, young as I am, to have seen some turn out to be very rotten hypocrites, though once they were in general esteem as more than ordinarily good men. I am sure we have all admired and loved persons

who after awhile have turned out to be utterly unworthy. They looked the more ripe because they were rotten: they were obliged to try and look like holy men because they feared that their real unholiness would be found out; just as some failing merchants make all the greater show to conceal their insolvency. You will rot if you do not ripen, depend on it. He that in the church of God does not grow more heavenly will become more devilish. It is a hard thing to be in the hot house of an earnest church without growing more rank if you do not grow more fruitful. Mind this, and God give you to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

One other reflection, and a very solemn one it is, while good fruits ripen, evil plants ripen too. While the wheat ripens for the harvest, the tares ripen also. They may grow together, and ripen together, but they will not be housed together. Dear hearers, some of you have been in this place now for years, and you are not converted. Well, you are ripening, you cannot help that; even weeds and tares come to maturity. "Let both grow together till the harvest." Look at these galleries and this vast area. I see before me three great fields of corn and tares. You are mingled while you grow. "Let both grow together till the harvest," that is the ripening and the dividing time. You are all growing, all ripening. Then, when all are ripe in the time of harvest, he will say to the reapers, "Gather together first the tares, bind them in bundles to burn them. Gather the wheat into my barn." O sinner, thine unbelief is ripening, it will ripen into despair. Thine enmity to God is ripening, it will ripen into everlasting rebellion against him. Even now thy heart grows harder and more stubborn, and thy death in sin becomes more hopeless every hour thou livest. Remember there shall be no hope that thy character will undergo improvement in another world. Then shall be fulfilled the saying which is written, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still." For ever and for ever the processes which ripen sin will continue to operate on condemned spirits, "where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." God grant you grace to believe in Jesus Christ now, that you may receive the new nature, and having received it may grow up into ripeness, that so God may be glorified. May we all be housed in the garner of ripe fruit in the King's own palace above! Amen and Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms cxvi.
and Philippians i