

## Getting and Losing

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"A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away." Ecclesiastes 3:6

The blessed Spirit saw fit under the old dispensation to make much use of proverbs and aphorisms; and there seems to be in that mode of instruction something peculiarly suited both to the character of the people, and also to the time in which the holy Scriptures were written. In those days, compared with our own, there was very little reading or writing; and therefore it was very desirable that instruction should be conveyed in short sentences (such as we find in the book of Proverbs), which might be easily remembered. And when these pithy sentences were written in what is called an "*antithetical*" form (that is, where one clause is opposed to, and as it were balances the other) like the point of an arrow, it gave the instruction a keener edge, and fastened it more deeply and firmly in the heart. But, besides this, we are to bear in mind that the Old Testament was given to the whole people of Israel. That dispensation did not resemble ours, in being restricted to the elect of God: it was a national dispensation; and therefore the Old Testament was, to a certain extent, a national book. We find, therefore, not only in the books of Moses, but scattered up and down the Sacred Writings, and especially the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, most clear and beautiful lessons on what is generally called "morality," and the guidance of conduct in the various relations of life.

But though the genius and character of that dispensation were national, yet God had an elect family, who were

spiritually taught, in the same way as God's elect family are taught now. The Holy Ghost, therefore, in revealing these Proverbs, pointed sayings, and aphorisms, so indited them, that under the external cover of moral instruction there was spiritual instruction deeply couched. So that, whilst the Proverbs afforded the most beautiful lessons of morality to those who looked no farther than mere morality, they also afforded blessed lessons of spiritual instruction to those who were enlightened by the Holy Ghost to see into the kernel, and were not satisfied with merely handling the shell.

Thus the Holy Ghost, in this chapter of Ecclesiastes, treating on the various incidents of human life, declares, that "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away." Here is a great deal of moral, natural truth. It is true, literally and naturally, that "There is a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted." But, under these natural incidents is contained spiritual instruction; and what appears to me to prove that there is an experimental meaning couched under the whole, is the expression—"*a time to kill.*" It cannot surely be true, literally and naturally, that there is "a time to kill;" for that would make the Holy Ghost sanction murder. "Thou shalt not kill" is one of the precepts of the Decalogue. The blessed Spirit, therefore, could never mean, literally and naturally, that there was "a time to kill." So that from this clue I gather that the Holy Ghost had a spiritual interpretation in view—"a time to kill" by the application of

God's law to the conscience; a season to slaughter the soul, so as to cut off all hope and help. And thus, this one expression, "a time to kill," seems at once to take our minds from the literal and natural interpretation of the whole; and to shew us there is a spiritual, experimental interpretation which lies hidden beneath the surface.

But what says the text? "*A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away.*" When God favours a man in providence, when he smiles upon his plans and arrangements, it is with him "a time to get." But if the Lord do not prosper a man in providence, he may rise early, and go to bed late; he may keep the best accounts, and lay out his plans in the most complete way; if it be not "a time to get," every hope and fair expectation will be entirely blighted. Thus also, there is "a time to lose," as many of our railway gentlemen have found. And how many too of the Lord's people have experimentally found in natural things there has been "a time to get," when the Lord has prospered every undertaking; and how painfully have they also found there is "a time to lose," when, as with Job, messenger comes after messenger to tell them of the loss of their worldly prosperity. So also, literally and naturally, there is "a time to keep" what a person gains by honest industry; and there is "a time to cast away" in acts of charity and liberality.

But shall I confine myself to this mere literal interpretation, which floats upon the surface? Shall I merely dip my hand into the froth and foam of the text, and leave untouched the spiritual treasures that are couched beneath? I cannot do so. I shall therefore, with God's blessing, entirely discard all further allusion to the literal and natural interpretation of the passage; and come at once to the spiritual and experimental signification.

The text, you will observe, is divided into two portions, each containing two clauses; these, I hope, with God's blessing, to take up and consider separately. May he who alone can give the blessing, clothe with power what may be spoken in weakness.

I.—"*A time to get.*" The Lord, in answer to a question put by his disciples, declared that "The Father hath put the times and seasons in his own power." (Acts 1:7.) Thus, there is appointed "a time to get." But to get *what*? Why, that which shall do our souls good for eternity; that which shall save us from "the wrath to come;" that which shall translate us from "the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son;" those "treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." (Matt. 6:20.)

But let us examine more closely the spiritual things that a living soul "gets." Of the things thus got some are painful, and others pleasurable; some are attended with sorrow, and others with joy; some kill, and others heal; some bring down, and others raise up.

i. Among the *painful* lessons experimentally learnt in the school of divine teaching are,

1. *A spiritual knowledge of God's holy character*; a gracious sight into, and a divine acquaintance with, Jehovah's perfections, his purity, his holiness, his majesty, his greatness, his omniscience, his omnipotence. Thus to know "the only true God" by the manifestations of himself to the soul, is a branch of heavenly getting. But this we cannot get without a corresponding discovery of our own deformity and vileness, our loss of the divine image, our alienation from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, because of the

blindness of our heart. Job had this discovery of the purity of Jehovah, when he said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job. 42:5, 6.) Isaiah, under a view of the glory of the Lord in the temple, cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5); and all Daniel's comeliness was turned into corruption when he saw the Lord by the side of the great river. (10:8.)

2. *A knowledge of the spirituality and breadth of God's holy law*, whereby the soul is brought in guilty before God, is another of those painful gettings which a living man has to experience. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." Through its application guilt falls upon the conscience. "Whatsoever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Rom. 3:19.) This cuts up self-righteousness, brings to light secret iniquities, and makes the offence to abound. It discovers sin of the eye, heart, hand, and tongue, and curses and condemns the least deviation from a perfect righteousness.

3. *A sound conviction of sin* is also one of the things got by the Lord's living family; not merely those natural convictions that go and come, that ebb and flow, and leave the soul for the most part as they found it, under the power of lust, and in the services of Satan; but that sound conviction of sin which penetrates into the very heart's core, and never leaves the sinner's conscience till it brings him to the Redeemer's feet; which never wears off till the blood of atonement is applied to the conscience; which brings out of the world, separates from dead professors, makes a man honest and sincere, leads him to sigh and cry to the Lord for a sense of his pardoning mercy, and finally issues in a blessed

deliverance.

4. *A knowledge of the corruptions of our fallen nature*—of our unbelief, infidelity, pride, hypocrisy, worldly mindedness, carnality, sensuality, and selfishness, with all the abounding evils of our deceitful and desperately wicked heart, is another branch of this painful getting. Without it there will be no humility or self loathing: no dread of falling, nor desire to be kept; no knowledge of the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin; no justifying of God, no condemning of ourselves.

5. *A knowledge of Satan's temptations, wiles, and snares*, of his craft and power, subtlety and malice, serpent windings and lion roarings, is another part of this painful getting.

ii. But there are gettings of a different kind—of a *pleasurable* nature. Such as,

1. *A spirit of grace and supplications*; and the "time to get" it, is then, and then only, when the blessed Spirit is pleased to communicate it. Wherever, by the Spirit's application of God's holy law to the conscience, there is got a sound conviction of sin, there is got, under the operation of that only and almighty Teacher, a heart to pour itself out in supplications, sighs, tears, and breathings at the footstool of mercy. "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them."

2. There is, also, "a time to get" *a knowledge of Jesus*; as we read, "this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3.) There is "a time to get" this knowledge of Jesus Christ; a knowledge of him as the Saviour from "the wrath to come;" a knowledge of him as "the Mediator between God

and men;" a knowledge of the efficacy of his atoning blood to cleanse a guilty conscience; a knowledge of his justifying righteousness to clothe the needy, naked soul; a knowledge of his dying love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost; a knowledge of his glorious Person; a knowledge of his tender sympathizing heart; a knowledge of him as "able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him."

3. There is "a time" also "to get" *faith*. When the blessed Spirit is pleased to raise up this precious grace in the soul, he draws it out to lay hold of the promises that he applies, the blood that he sprinkles, the Saviour that he reveals, the love that he sheds abroad, and the truth that he makes experimentally known.

4. There is "a time" too "to get" *the pardon of sin* by the sweet manifestations of pardoning love to the soul.

5. And to mention summarily other branches of this heavenly getting, there is "a time to get" *a knowledge of interest in the love and blood of the Lamb*; at "a time to get" *a spiritual sight of the Lord Jesus Christ in his sufferings*; "a time to get" that *union and communion with him* which is life and peace. There is "a time," also, "to get" *heavenly affections, spiritual delights, tender sensations, holy longings, divine feelings*. And, to add no more, there is "a time to get" *everything which fits the soul for a glorious and happy immortality*.

iii. But you will observe that the blessed Spirit has said, there is "*a time to get*." And this time is in his hands who holds all times and seasons at his own sovereign disposal. This indeed is a lesson which the Lord's people have, for the most part, painfully to learn; that though they see the blessings revealed in the gospel, they cannot get them except when

they are dropped into their heart and shed abroad in their soul by the Holy Ghost. But what are these times to get?

1. One time is *a time of affliction*. This is, for the most part, the time that the Lord first begins the work of grace upon the sinner's conscience. The Lord often makes use of affliction to take the sinner aside, as it were, that he may speak to his heart. A sick bed separates him from the world, or some family affliction shews him the emptiness of all human happiness, or some reverse in circumstances brings down his pride and ambition. And at this season the Lord often opens his ear to receive instruction; and thus the time of affliction often proves "a time to get." So also, with respect to the manifestations of grace, mercy, and love—it is, for the most part, in times of trial, of sorrow, and despondency; in times when there is no hope for the soul except in the free mercy of God, that any real blessing is got from the Lord.

2. *A time of temptation* is also usually "a time to get." In seasons of temptation, we get a knowledge of our own weakness and wickedness, learn our helplessness against Satan's temptations, and experience the Lord's delivering hand.

3. There is also a time *to favour Zion* and when that set time comes it is "a time to get." Before that time arrives, we may try to get; but, like the disciples, we toil all night, and get nothing. But when the set time arrives, the net is cast on the right side of the ship, and the blessings come as it were spontaneously to hand.

II.—But there is not only "a time to get," there is also "*a time to lose*;" and the one season is set over against the other. And just as it is the blessed Spirit, and he alone, who brings about the "time to get;" so it is the blessed Spirit, and he



alone, who brings about the "time to lose."

But what does a man lose? In the same way, as what he "gets" is for his soul's good, his everlasting profit, his eternal peace; so what he "loses" is only that which, were it not parted with, his soul would be a sufferer. For instance,

1. There is a losing of *our own righteousness*. O how many there are who are building their hopes of heaven entirely upon this sandy foundation! But not so with the Lord's family. There is "a time" for them "to lose" this cobweb garment; a time when creature righteousness is taken from them, and they are stripped of those filthy rags which cannot shield them from the eye of omniscient justice. And when is this time? When there is a discovery to the conscience of the perfections of Jehovah; of the purity of his law; of that holy majesty and justice which eternally dwell in him, which require a righteousness pure, spotless, and undefiled, and can accept no other. Thus, when the Lord is pleased to bring before the eyes, and let down into the soul, a sense of his greatness and majesty, and applies the edge of his spiritual precepts to the conscience, then is the time when we begin to lose our own righteousness; then it appears in our eyes as nothing but filthy rags; then we know, that if we have no other righteousness, we must be eternally lost; and thus we are made to part with it, that we may be clothed with the Lamb's imputed righteousness, and so stand before God without spot, or blemish, or any such thing.

2. There is a losing also of *our fleshly holiness*. What Christian in days past has not aimed at creature holiness? Even after he had been convinced that his own legal righteousness will not save him, yet how hard he has toiled and tugged to get some gospel holiness, something in himself that he can look upon as spiritual and heavenly, something of an evangelical nature that he can present to

God, and lay down before him as acceptable in his sight. But there is "a time to lose" this fleshly holiness, however dressed out in a gospel garb, as we lost our legal righteousness. And when is that time? When the corruptions of our heart are laid bare, when sin is allowed to come in like a flood, so as to sweep away all those dreams (for dreams they are) of fleshly holiness and creature perfection; when we are put into Satan's sieve and have our religion riddled backwards and forwards till every sound grain seems gone, and nothing rises to the top but the chaff which the wind blows away; when the Lord puts the soul into the furnace of affliction, and nothing comes to the surface but the dross and scum which are taken away by the Refiner;—*then* is the "time to lose" this fleshly holiness that we once so dearly prized, and so ardently and anxiously longed to obtain. It is lost, utterly lost, when the Lord gives us a sight of what we are, and gives us a glimpse of what *He* is.

3. *Our own wisdom*—there is "a time to lose" that. There was a time, doubtless, with us, when we fancied ourselves very wise; especially when we had made some little progress, as we fancied, in religion, and had stored a few doctrines in our heads; when we had read a few authors, or had studied the Bible, and compared passage with passage and chapter with chapter. We doubtless congratulated ourselves on possessing a vast amount of wisdom, and thought we knew everything because we had some understanding in the letter of God's word. But there is "a time to lose" all this wisdom. When we get into difficulties, trials, temptations, and perplexities, then our wisdom all disappears, and we find it little else than ignorance and folly. It does not avail us when most needed. It cannot guide us into paths of peace; it cannot keep us from evil or error. Like a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint, it gives way the moment any weight or stress is laid upon it. (Prov. 25:19.)

4. There is a time, also to lose *all our self-strength, self-confidence, and self-dependence*. Strength to stand against temptation, to overcome sin, to crucify the flesh, to pluck out right eyes and cut off right hands; to believe, hope, or love; to think, speak, or do any one thing spiritually good; to bless, comfort, or deliver our own souls; to raise up one sigh, cry, or desire Godward;—in all these things we painfully learn that strength we have none.

But there is "a *time* to lose." And this time is in the hand of the Lord. We can no more bring upon our souls "a time to lose," than we can bring upon our souls "a time to get." When the "time to get" comes, then we get what the Lord is pleased to bestow. "That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good." When the Lord bestows a blessing, when he gives a smile, when he drops a word, when he favours the soul with some intimation of his goodness and mercy, it is "a time to get." But when the Lord hides his face, withdraws his presence, allows the corruption of the heart to work, lets Satan stir up that filthy pool we carry within us—then it is the "time to lose." "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled, thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust." (Psalm 104: 2:.) If we are the Lord's, he will bring upon us, sooner or later, the "time to lose;" and then we shall lose everything that thousands rejoice in—yea, everything that creature can boast of, or put its confidence in. Wherever there has been "a time to get," there will be also "a time to lose." These two are closely connected; the one is the mortise, the other the tenon; the one is the sinking bucket in the well, and the other the rising bucket; the one is the day of adversity, and the other the day of prosperity, which the Lord has set the one over against the other.

Now, there may be some here, with whom it is "a time to get." Some, perhaps, are getting convictions of sin such as they never before felt; some are getting a knowledge of the perfections of God's character which they never before were acquainted with; some are getting views of Jesus that their souls never before were favoured with; some are getting promises, some are getting invitations, some are getting peace, some are getting encouragements, some are getting evidences, some are getting testimonies, some are getting whispers, and some are getting smiles. And then, perhaps, in this congregation (as we would hope there are some of the Lord's people here present this evening) it is with others "a time to lose." They find all their own righteousness beginning to fade before their eyes and becoming as filthy rags; they find the corruptions of their heart made manifest, so that they are losing by degrees all their fleshly holiness; they find the workings of secret sin continually boiling up within; they feel their strength oozing away, and that they have not the power they thought they once had to stand against indwelling evil; they find they have not power to read God's word as in times past, nor power to cry unto the Lord, nor power to realize his presence, nor power to believe, hope, or love. Thus with some, it is "a time to get;" and with others, it is "a time to lose." Happy getting! happy losing! The getting is of God, and the losing is of God! Yes; it is a mercy to get, and it is a mercy to lose. It is a mercy that God should ever favour our souls with his own times and seasons to drop something worth having into our hearts; or to take something away worth losing; to give us that which shall make our souls meet for eternity, and to strip us of that which is nothing but deception and delusion.

III.—There is also "*a time to keep, and a time to cast away.*" Is it not one thing to "*get,*" and another thing to "*keep?*" Is it not one thing to "*lose,*" and another thing to "*cast away?*" It

is so naturally. There are some people who can "get"— persons who have a peculiar turn for business, and whom the Lord favours with natural wisdom and earthly prosperity. Whatever they put their hand to seems to succeed. Yet they cannot keep it; they cannot retain what they have earned: it flies hastily out of their hand, or dribbles insensibly away. So spiritually; we must "get" before we can "keep." Is it not so naturally? Before a man can keep a thing, surely he must get it. And so it is in divine things. "A time to get" comes before "a time to keep." And do you not observe how the "time to keep" follows the "time to lose?" This, then, is the order of the Spirit's teachings in the heart. He begins with a sinner's conscience, and he communicates certain things, such as a conviction of sin, a knowledge of God's holy law, cries and sighs after mercy; and in due time he gives him a knowledge of Jesus, evidences and testimonies of interest in him, love visits, smiles, and manifestations. All these a living soul gets. But then the "time to lose" comes, when he loses all his own righteousness, his own holiness, his own strength; his own wisdom, his own comeliness. But he does not lose any one thing which God has put into his heart. As, therefore, there is "a time to get" what God gives, and "a time to lose" what God takes away, so there is "a time to keep" what the Lord himself is pleased to bestow upon the soul.

But *what* is it that we are "to keep?" In our early days we amass a great deal of what we fancy to be religion; and when the "time to lose" comes, it seems pretty well all lost. Have not some of you had such storms to blow down upon you, as though they would sweep out of your heart everything that you hoped God had put there? And have you not had such seasons of darkness come upon you, that you could not see any one mark of divine teaching, or any one feature of Christ's image? That was "a time to lose." But if God has done anything for your soul, has communicated any

real blessing to your heart, or spoken one soft word to your conscience, that is to be kept. We are not to part with any one thing God is pleased to do for our souls. We are not to cast away one grain of the treasure that God has lodged in earthen vessels. We are not to throw to the moles and to the bats any one thing, however feeble it may appear, that comes from God; for having come from him, it is a good and perfect gift.

The blessed Spirit works upon the heart; but our most holy and religious flesh will work with the blessed Spirit. In early days are we not very ignorant, and often mistake the letter for the spirit, and the form for the power? But when the Lord begins to put the soul into the furnace, and permits it to be riddled in Satan's sieve, the effect is to burn up, or sift away every thing that is of the creature and of the flesh. But mark, that which God himself has done for the soul, it leaves untouched. There is, therefore, "a time to keep." Satan does not care how much you keep of the flesh but he will try hard to baffle you out of everything that God has done for your soul. If he see you heaping up chaff, he will encourage you to heap up more; but if he see you storing up a few grains of solid wheat, he will try, by a blast of his mouth, or a whirl of his sieve, to blow those few grains out of your hand. If he see you very self-wise, self-righteous, or self-confident, he will encourage you in all that; but if he see you doubting, fearing, desponding, tried, and exercised, he will endeavour, in another form, to persuade you that you have never received anything from God, and that all your religion is but a mass of hypocrisy. When, therefore, the blessed Spirit has told us there is "a time to get," and also "a time to lose," in order to shew that we do not lose any one thing which he has communicated, he adds, there is "a time to keep."

But *what* have we to *keep*? Everything that God has done for

the soul, especially everything that we can look upon as a real blessing. For instance: have you ever had any deliverance? Has the Lord ever proclaimed liberty to your soul? Has he ever applied a promise to your heart? Has he ever dropped a word softly and sweetly into your conscience? Has he ever answered your prayers? Has he ever made darkness light before you, and crooked things straight? Has he ever revealed himself to you? Has he ever raised up in your heart faith in his blessed self? Has he ever sprinkled your conscience with atoning blood? Has he ever discovered to you his glorious righteousness and assured you, you are personally interested in it? Has he ever shed abroad any measure of his love in your heart, and made himself very near, very dear, and very precious to your soul?

Now these things Satan will be perpetually trying to baffle your soul out of. He will keep whispering, 'It was all delusion and fleshly excitement; it was not real; it did not come from God; it did not come in *this way*, it did not come in *that way*. How do you know,' he will say (for he can reason very ably; he is a thorough master of rhetoric) 'that it was from God? Those broken feelings you once had—those tears that rolled down your cheeks—that melting of heart under a sense of the Lord's presence—that whisper which came into your conscience—that word which dropped into your soul—that deliverance out of trial—that snare so powerfully broken—that temptation out of which you were brought—how do you know' (Satan can plead with all the art and craft of a counsellor) 'it came from God?' And the poor soul very often in these seasons of darkness, temptation, and perplexity, cannot answer, 'Yes it was God.' As the church of old said, "We see not our signs;" so he cannot see that *this* was of God, or *that* was of God. He can see it in others; he can see the image of Jesus in the children of God: but he cannot see the work of God upon himself.

But the Holy Spirit says, there is "*a time* to keep." And when is this *time*? Why, the very time that Satan is trying to baffle you out of it; when he says, 'Give it all up; cast aside your profession; go into the world; never come before God's face any more, lest he strike you dead for presumption; never go to hear an experimental minister again, lest he unmask you as an hypocrite; never read the writings of gracious men again, lest you only add to your condemnation.' When Satan is dealing out his rhetoric and infernal oratory, that is the very "time to keep." What! will you part with your blessings, with your evidences, with your manifestations, with your sweet discoveries, with your love visits, with the Lord's smiles, with anything that you believe, in your right mind, God has done for your soul? There is "*a time* to keep;" and it is in temptation, in trial, in difficulty that this time is. It is like a man going into the city with a large sum of money about him—how he keeps his hand upon it, lest sharp fingers should pilfer his treasure! So with the children of God. If the Lord bestow a favour, how careful the soul is lest that footpad Satan should rob it of its heavenly treasure! When the blessed Spirit shines upon the soul, brightens its evidences, shows it that *this* or *that* word came from the Lord—that *this* was a token for good—that *this* deliverance was an answer to prayer—that the Lord appeared for us *here*, and appeared for us *there*—when the blessed Spirit is thus pleased to lift up a standard when Satan comes in like a flood—then it is "*a time* to keep." And, depend upon it, we shall want to keep all we have got. The Lord will ever make us feel poor and needy, and will bring us into such spots and places as to make us value the least blessing; he will make us prize the feeblest evidence, and cleave to the scantiest testimony. But are there not some bright spots that you can now and then look back upon? some "Ebenezers?" some "hill Mizars?" Can you look back upon the time when the Lord first blessed your soul? Can you put your hand upon the season



when there was first a discovery of Jesus? when you first heard the word with power? when your heart was first melted with sensations of mercy and love? Now, these are to be diligently kept, highly to be prized, deeply to be stored up in your heart. These are the jewels that Bunyan speaks of in the 'Pilgrim;' the roll in the bosom, the mark on the forehead. By these the soul will be recognised when it stands before the "great white throne;" and therefore, they are to be kept, not to be parted with, whatever Satan may urge, whatever reason may argue, whatever the flesh may say, whatever the wickedness and infidelity of our hearts may plead. Every thing from the Lord is to be kept, and highly prized, because it springs from the mercy and goodness of God.

IV.—But as there is "a time to keep," so there is also "*a time to cast away.*" What do we cast away? That which in time past, perhaps, we hoarded as a great treasure, prized very highly, and set an amazing value upon. As we keep everything that comes from God, so we cast away everything that does not bear his stamp upon it. Everything that does not come with divine savour and unction into the heart; everything that wears upon its face the suspicious tint of nature, and does not bear the stamp of grace, is to be "cast away." God puts his mark upon genuine silver only; the plated goods never wear the stamp of heaven. Just as in nature we cast away whatsoever is refuse and vile; as we sweep the dust and rubbish out of our house, and the filth and dirt into the streets; so when the Lord is pleased to shine into a man's soul, and shows him what he has done and is doing for him, he casts away as dust and rubbish all that does not bear God's mark, and is not stamped from heaven's own mint. For instance,

1. We "cast away" *presumption*. There was a time when,

perhaps, some of you mistook presumption for faith; but when the Lord shewed you what a horrible thing presumption was, and made you see and feel the difference between presumption and faith, then the closer did you clasp living faith to your bosom, and the more you cast presumption away.

2. There was a time, perhaps, when you were satisfied with a *notional acquaintance with the gospel*; and because you were a sound Calvinist, you thought you were a sound Christian. But you have been taught, some of you, by painful exercises and soul perplexities, the distinction between the letter and the spirit, the form and the power: and you "cast away"—not the doctrines; no; they are to be highly prized, for they are the very sum and substance of gospel truth; but you "cast away" a natural knowledge of them, a notional acquaintance with them, as a thing quite distinct from the application of truth with divine power to your heart.

3. You "cast away" also *fleshly excitement* in religion. Fleshly excitement is the all in all of most professors of religion. A few natural tears trickling down the cheeks; a few carnal passions wrought upon by the eloquence of the preacher; a few movings and meltings of natural affection under a pathetic discourse; a calm, softened feeling produced by a well-sung hymn or a swelling organ; a thrill of rapture from listening to a description of the joys of heaven; a hearing others talk of their assurance till by imitation they are persuaded of their own—this carnal excitement passes for religion with hundreds and thousands. But *you* who are better taught "cast it away;" *you* are afraid of this fleshly excitement; you are afraid to mistake the natural tear trickling down the cheek for the godly sorrow that the blessed Spirit raises up; you are afraid to mistake the mere raising up of the natural spirits for the liftings up of the light

of God's countenance. Therefore *you* "cast away" as dangerous and delusive all mere fleshly excitement.

4. And you cast "away" also *all dependence on the creature*; all confidence in self, all looking to man, all resting upon an arm of flesh. You have been so wounded and pierced by resting on an arm of flesh, that you cast it away, as you would a reed that had run into your hand and pierced you, or as Paul shook off the viper into the fire.

5. You "cast away" too your own *wisdom*, for it has proved to be folly. You "cast away" your own *strength*, for you know it to be utter weakness. You "cast away" *making resolutions*, for you know you cannot keep them. You "cast away" *making promises*, for you know you cannot fulfil them. You "cast away" *creature faith* because you know it cannot stand your soul in the day of wrath. Your desire to "cast away" *pride*; to "cast away" *self-seeking*; yea, to "cast away" everything that wears the appearance of godliness, and yet does not bear the stamp and mark of God upon it. You "cast away" an *empty profession*, and a name to live while dead, and being settled upon your lees. In one word, you "cast away" with contempt and shame, everything that the blessed Spirit has discovered to you to spring from the creature, and to be the mere product of nature and the flesh.

But there is "a *time* to cast away"—such as a time of *sickness*, when death is in sight, and when the heart sinks and quakes before eternity; a time of *temptation*, when the heart wants something to bear it up amid the storm; a time of trial, when we want God himself to be the strength of our heart here, and our portion for ever.

Thus, as the Lord leads his people, he carries on in them two apparently opposite, yet blessedly reconcilable operations.

The Spirit keeps stripping and clothing, wounding and healing, making poor and making rich, bringing low and raising up. Sometimes he gives, and sometimes he takes away; sometimes makes Jesus precious, sometimes makes self hateful; sometimes gives true signs, sometimes takes away false tokens; some times bestows real testimonies, sometimes takes away false evidences; sometimes gives spiritual faith, sometimes takes away natural faith; sometimes gives true confidence, sometimes takes away vain confidence; sometimes gives true love, sometimes takes away the mere excitement of the flesh and of the creature. And yet, all for one end—to render Jesus precious, and make the soul meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He deals with the soul in grace, as the clever sculptor deals with the marble block. He chips out a piece *here*, and makes prominent a piece *there*; and at last brings out the beautiful figure of man. So the blessed Spirit—that true sculptor, who engraves Christ's image in the heart—sometimes gives and sometimes takes; sometimes pares *here*, sometimes puts on *there*; till at last he brings forth the image of Christ in the soul, and forms him in the heart, "the hope of glory."

Now, this religion with two sides to it, only the family of God are acquainted with. As to those who know nothing of divine teaching—with them it is all getting, getting, getting. But what does it end in? When God manifests his displeasure, it is all blown away in a moment. They are storing their granaries with chaff, heaping up treasures of dross, filling their bottles with smoke, and making ropes of sand. All, all that is so laboriously got, and so highly prized, one breath from the Lord will one day disperse to the four winds of heaven. But the Lord's people have a religion which has two sides to it. All their religion consists in what the blessed Spirit is pleased himself to communicate to them. What he teaches they know; what he gives, they possess; what he inspires,

they feel; and what he breathes into their heart, they enjoy. His work is, to keep stripping them of self, and manifesting to them a precious Jesus, and their interest in him. And thus, under the Spirit's teaching, they grow weaker, and yet stronger; they get worse in self, and more sensibly complete in Christ; they grow down in humility, and upward into faith. Thus, by the Spirit's blessed work upon their souls, they lose all that stands in nature, and they get all that stands in the Spirit. So that, the Lord's people all experimentally prove the truth of these words, "There is a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away."

And what have *you* got? How many years have you made a profession? Ten, twenty, thirty years? What have you got during all this time? Anything worth keeping? Any religion that will stand the storm? Any faith that will abide the trying hour? Depend upon it, if you have got anything that will stand the storm, that will endure in the trying hour, it is what the Spirit has been pleased to lodge in your heart. And, depend upon it, if ever we have got anything from God, we have lost as well as got; there has been "a time to lose" as well as "a time to get." And if we have anything that we keep, and sometimes can bless God for, and look upon with sweetness as an Ebenezer—if there is anything that really we feel, in dark trying seasons, worth keeping, something that God himself has done for our souls—depend upon it, we shall have to "cast away" every thing else. The Lord will never suffer us to keep the flesh, and keep the Spirit; to keep his testimonies, and to keep our own; to keep true confidence, and to keep false confidence; to keep the favour of God, and to keep the favour of man. He will never let us keep in the one hand a spiritual religion, and in another a fleshly religion. He will never let us keep in one hand Christ's righteousness, and in the other our fleshly holiness. We shall not have two chambers in our heart, and fill one with Christ's riches, and

the other with creature riches. We shall never have self to bow down to, idolize, and worship in one niche, and the Lord of life and glory to worship in another. The same bounteous hand that gives, strips and spoils; the same kind Benefactor that puts it into the heart to keep what God has committed there, enables us, yea, "casts away" *for* us, "casts away" *in* us, what does not bear God's stamp, and his heavenly mark. And O, when we come to look at things in this light, how little we have that really seems got from God! how little we have that seems really worth keeping! If you "cast away" all that you have learnt from men; all your dry, notional knowledge; all your self-righteousness and fleshly holiness; when you "cast it all away" as the mariners on board Paul's ship cast the wheat into the sea, and leave nothing behind but what God has done for you—a word here, and a smile there; a promise now, and a whisper then—how little there is! How many things will there be worth keeping when we lie upon a death-bed, are made honest before God, and eternity stares us in the face? When fears, and doubts, and trials, and temptations have blown away all fleshly confidence and all creature religion, how many testimonies will then be left in our soul to go into eternity with? How many answers to prayer? How many applications of the blood of Jesus? How many sweet manifestations of his presence? How many visits from his gracious self? How many words dropped with his own power into the heart? One, two, three, four, five, or ten? If we have one, it will save us; but one will not satisfy. Like Gideon, we must have token upon token, sign upon sign: one will not satisfy; evidence upon evidence, testimony upon testimony, whisper upon whisper, smile upon smile, answer upon answer. We never can have too much; yet how little it is when all is summed up!

Now, when your religion is held up in these balances; when all is pared away except God's teaching and God's

revealing—how little, O how little remains! When weighed up in these strict, unerring "balances of the sanctuary" how scanty a shred is left! And yet that little will save. And sure I am, the man whose heart is made honest before God, never wants to have any religion but what God teaches; he never wants to lean upon anything but what God does for him. No; he cannot go into eternity except with what the Lord has been pleased to work in his heart with power.

As the Lord, then, carries on from time to time his gracious work in the soul, and brings these times and seasons over our head and into our heart, we shall find and prove to the very letter the words of the text, there is "a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away." The Lord favour us with many such times.