

SPIRITUAL TIMES AND SEASONS

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“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 laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” [Ec 3:3-4](#).

WHAT an instance is King Solomon of the vanity of all creature enjoyments, and the emptiness of all creature attainments! The wisest of mankind, and yet often doing actions of which a fool might be ashamed! Speaking, by divine inspiration, in the Proverbs, the language of most blessed instruction, and yet in conduct violating well nigh every precept which he had given, and acting in direct opposition to every proverb which he had inculcated! Seated in peace upon the throne of his father David, enjoying every pleasure which wealth could minister, supplied with every gratification that his senses could delight in, and then forced in his old age to write “vanity and vexation of spirit” upon them all! In his declining years reaping the bitter fruits of backsliding from God, and giving to us in this book of Ecclesiastes **which appears to be the expression of his repentance** his own dearly-bought experience of the utter vanity and instability of all creature enjoyments and expectations, and brought to see that there was nothing worth having but the fear of the Lord in the heart in blessed exercise, and the testimony of God in the soul!

Now, in this diversified experience through which King Solomon passed, he learned lessons which were not to be arrived at through any other channel. It was not in vain that he had every gratification presented to his carnal mind; it was not in vain that “he made himself gardens and orchards,” and “gat him men-singers and women-singers,” that “whatsoever his eyes desired he kept not from them, and withheld not his heart from any joy;” for “he looked on all the works that his hands had wrought, and on the labour that he had laboured to do; and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun” [Ec 2:5,8,10-11](#). He has thus set up a beacon that we might, with God’s blessing, avoid the shoals on which he struck; a light-house blazes forth, that we might not fall foul on the sands on which his frail bark too often ran; and thus, the Spirit of God sealing the instruction upon our souls, that we might steer clear of those reefs which the Holy Ghost has traced out by his pen in this chart of his perilous navigation.

Let no one misunderstand me. I believe that Solomon was a gracious character, and that he is now in glory; but the Lord left him to do many things which showed plainly that he was but a man, and which clearly prove that he

was not able to act up to the lessons of divine wisdom which he taught. And he is a striking instance how that, placed as he was in an eminent situation, and not being kept by the grace of God from the many temptations to which his very wealth and station exposed him, he was carried away by them to the future distress of his soul. But in this chequered path of experience he learned a lesson, the fruit of which is recorded in this chapter, that “the times and the seasons the Father hath put in His own power” [Ac 1:7](#).

Solomon’s experience gave the free-will that lurked in his bosom a fatal stab, turned upside down the wisdom of the creature, broke into a thousand shivers all his fleshly righteousness, and convinced him deeply of the sovereignty of God reigning over all his purposes, words, and works. And therefore, as the fruit of this wisdom, which was communicated through the channel of personal experience, he came to this solemn conclusion, that “for everything there was a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven;” that these times are in the hands of God; not to be precipitated, not to be retarded; not depending upon the movements of the creature; not fluctuating with the restless tide of human will and purpose, but fixed in the sovereign decrees of Jehovah, and fulfilled at such a moment and in such a manner as it pleaseth Him “who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” [Eph 1:11](#).

But the chief point to which I wish, with God’s blessing, to call your attention this evening, is that portion of experimental truth which is set forth in the words of the text.

The work of grace upon the soul may be divided into two distinct operations of the Spirit of God upon the heart; the one is to break down the creature into nothingness and self-abasement before God; the other is to exalt the crucified Jesus as “God over all, blessed for ever,” upon the wreck and ruin of the creature. And these two lessons **distinct, and yet so far combined as to tend to one centre-the glory of God in the salvation of the soul** the blessed Spirit writes with power upon every quickened vessel of mercy. “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 laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.”

i There is, then, “a time to kill”-that is, there is an appointed season in God’s eternal counsels when the sentence of death is to be known and felt in the consciences of all His elect. That time cannot be hurried, that time cannot be delayed. All the counsel of parents, all the advice of instructors, all the sermons of gospel ministers, all the reading of religious books cannot hurry forward that time; and all the wretched recklessness and profaneness of our base hearts, all the snares and temptations that Satan is continually seeking to

entangle the feet in, all the desperate pride, presumption, hypocrisy, unbelief, and self-righteousness of the carnal mind have no power to retard that time. The hands of that clock, of which the will of God is the spring, and His decrees the pendulum, are beyond the reach of human fingers to move on or put back.

But we observe from the text that the killing precedes the healing, and that the breaking down goes before the building up; that the elect weep before they laugh, and mourn before they dance. In this track does the Holy Spirit move; in this channel do His blessed waters flow. The first “time” then of which the text speaks is that season when the Holy Ghost takes them in hand in order to kill them. And how does He kill them? By applying with power to their consciences the spirituality of God’s holy law, and thus bringing the sentence of death into their souls—the Spirit of God employing the law as a ministration of condemnation to cut up all creature righteousness.

Every vessel of mercy must experience more or less of this killing work in his conscience. God has not indeed, in His Word, fixed any certain mode in which the sword shall enter a man’s heart, but He has said positively and decisively that there is “a time to kill”. This must be understood spiritually and experimentally, unless we believe that any “time” can legalise murder. Nay, the very words that follow, “a time to heal,” prove that spiritual, not natural, killing is intended. The killed soul can be healed, but not the killed body. But if none are spiritually healed before they are spiritually killed, and if none shall see “the Sun of righteousness” but those upon whom He “arises with healing in His wings,” every vessel of mercy, according to the depth of the Spirit’s work in his heart, must know what it is to have the sentence of death and condemnation take place in his conscience.

But some shall say, “How am I to know whether I have been spiritually killed?” I will tell you. Have you experienced the effects of death? When we see a corpse lying in a coffin, it is not a question with us whether it is living or dead, for we see the pallid features of death stamped upon it. Thus it is with the elect of God. Do you want to know whether you have been killed? Have you experienced the fruits and effects of that killing? Has death been stamped upon your own righteousness? Has the sentence of guilt and condemnation fallen with weight and power into your conscience? Have you seen nothing in self to deliver you from “the wrath to come?” Have you stood before the bar of God an arraigned and guilty criminal? Have you gone to Him, as the six citizens of Calais went before our Edward III, with a halter round your neck, waiting only for the sentence of execution to drop from the mouth of the king? Has all your comeliness been turned into corruption, so that the steam of

putrefaction has come up into your nostrils, and you have been in the valley of Hamon-Gog? [Eze 39:11](#).

These are the fruits and effects of death. I believe we are to measure our experience of this spiritual death, not so much by the way in which we have died, as by what fruits and effects have been felt in our souls. Now you must know very well whether, when you come before God, you come before Him as a guilty criminal or an accepted child; whether you call upon Him as having the sentence of condemnation in your heart, or as having the sweet voice of the blood of Jesus speaking in you better things than the blood of Abel [Heb 12:24](#). You must know, if you will be but honest with yourself, whether in solemn moments you expect hell's doom as your portion, or the realms of eternal light, peace, and love. You must know whether you are labouring under the "spirit of bondage," or enjoying some measure of blessed liberty; whether in your solemn approaches to God you see anger and wrath in His countenance, and tremble under His frowns, or whether you bask beneath His approving smiles. These are matters of conscience; these are things in experience which cannot be wrapped up, blinked at and evaded by a living soul.

Everyone quickened into spiritual tenderness of heart must have an inward witness that he is on one side of the line or the other. A living man whose religion moves only as the Spirit moves, and whose "faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," is not to be hoodwinked and blindfolded, and led away from inward teachings into uncertainties. The man who has any experience at all cannot get away from that which takes place in those secret chambers, because conscience, though it has a still voice, can neither be bribed into a false verdict, nor overawed into mute acquiescence; though it only speaks inwardly, it speaks with authority; though like Him who is the Author of it, it lifts not up its voice in the streets, yet it secretly bears an inward testimony, which must be heard and submitted to. If you, then, feel a poor, guilty, wretched criminal, condemned to die, one that sees no hope of escape from "the wrath to come" through creature-righteousness, but one that stands self-condemned and self-aborred before the bar of the most righteous God-know this, if you feel these things, if you sigh and groan and cry under the heavy burden of them, that "the sword has pierced through your own heart also," and that you have experienced "a time to kill".

But it is not merely man's **righteousness** that God means to kill, but also man's **pride**. O cursed pride, that is ever lifting up its head in our hearts! Pride, that would even pull down God that it might sit upon His throne. Pride, that would trample under foot the holiest things to exalt itself! Pride, that can feed upon the letter of truth as well as upon garbage! Pride, that can wrap up

itself in the monk's cowl and flaunt abroad in the attire of the harlot! Pride, that can soar aloft to the heights of creature-holiness, and wallow in the filthy kennel of impurity! That monstrous creature within us, of such ravenous and indiscriminate gluttony, that the more it devours, the more it craves, and "enlargeth its desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied" [Hab 2:5](#). Pride, that chameleon which assumes every colour, that actor which can play every part, and yet which is constant to no one object or purpose but to exalt and glorify self!

There is, then, "a time to kill" pride. And oh, what cutting weapons the Lord will sometimes make use of to kill a man's pride! How He will bring him sometimes into the depths of temporal poverty, that He may make a stab at his worldly pride! How He will bring to light the iniquities of his youth, that He may mortify his self-righteous pride! How He will suffer sin to break forth, if not openly, yet so powerfully within, that piercing convictions shall kill his spiritual pride! And what deep discoveries of internal corruption, what a breaking up of "the fountains of the great deep," what a leading into the chambers of imagery will the Lord sometimes employ to dig down to the root, and cut off the fibres of that poisonous tree-pride! The Searcher of hearts dissects and anatomizes this inbred evil, cuts down to it through the quivering and bleeding flesh, and pursues with His keen knife its multiplied windings and ramifications.

But there is "a time to kill" not only a man's pride, but also his **wisdom**; to slaughter it, and, as it were, drain away the life-blood from it. How delusively does this fleshly wisdom of ours act, in endeavouring to substitute the mere knowledge of truth in the letter, for the teachings of God in the soul! And how many are deceived in various ways by leaning to their own wisdom, instead of feeling fools before God, and looking up to Him for His blessed instruction! But the Lord will effectually kill creature-wisdom in the hearts of His people, by bringing them into those straits and difficulties, into those sharp and severe exercises, into those bitter and distressing temptations; where all human reasoning gives up the ghost, where knowledge and understanding are baffled and confounded, and the arm of the creature is so palsy-stricken that it cannot take any one promise out of the Word of God, to administer comfort to the troubled soul.

"I will destroy," says the Lord, "the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" [1Co 1:19-20](#); The wise man is not to "glory in his wisdom" [Jer 9:23](#), but glory in it he will until it is killed, and he learns, at the

knife's point, that the Lord "turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish" [Isa 44:25](#). The best lessons are learnt in affliction. A man never learns anything to profit while standing upon a lofty mountain. It is in the valley of humiliation, it is in seasons of distress, trouble, anxiety, perplexity, and temptation, that a man learns the secrets of heavenly wisdom, for in them he learns his own folly, and that "the Lord giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" [Pr 2:6](#).

ii But it is not all killing work. If God kills His people it is to make them alive [1Sa 2:6](#); if He wounds them, it is that He may heal; if He brings down, it is that He may lift up. We cannot see it at the time. I have thought when I was in perplexity of soul, that I never should see what it was for; and I have almost told God so. It was impossible to see the object intended. Such a cloud of pitchy darkness lowered over it, that I felt in my own mind convinced that I never should be brought to see the reason of the dispensation. But I have been brought to see the reason, and to view the merciful kindness of God in bringing me into those straits and difficulties, wherein He caused the sighs and groans of my heart to ascend to His holy ears. But when we are passing under these exercises, we seem as though we could almost dare to tell God to His face, that even He Himself cannot bring good out of them-as though the matter was too crooked even for His arm to make straight. Such poor wretches are we when left to ourselves!

But there is "a time to heal;" and until the time comes as appointed in the mind of God, there is no effectual healing. We may seek to the physicians, like Asa when he was diseased in his feet [2Ch 16:12](#); we may go and beg some plaister from our friends; may creep under the wing of some minister; may endeavour to persuade ourselves we have received some comfort; may try to treasure up in our bosoms some text; may attempt to act faith upon some promise; may do our best to convince ourselves that we have been cured-and yet the old leprosy breaks out again. After all these make-believes, we do but resemble a credulous patient who has resorted to a quack for some deep-seated disease, and whose complaint bursts forth more violently when the temporary stimulus of the high-sounding nostrum has ceased. He then finds every symptom aggravated, and sinks deeper into despondency, because the remedy which promised to cure has increased the malady.

And so if the Lord has really smitten you with disease, all your quack remedies will fail, and you will be ready at times, like the poor lunatic in Bedlam, to tear off the plaisters that men would put upon you, because they only irritate you. You feel, at times, as though you would away with them all, crying aloud, "Miserable comforters are ye all" and "physicians of no value".

Doctrines you see clearly in the Bible, but they afford no relief to **you; promises suitable to your case, but they bring no consolation to **you**; children of God walking in the enjoyment of sweet manifestations, but they cannot communicate their comfort to **you**; ministers tracing out your experience, but the Spirit of God does not bless it to **you**; preachers and teachers setting forth Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, but He does not manifest Himself as an all-sufficient Saviour to **you**.**

And so you go on, fearing that the time will never come when the Lord will drop a word of consolation into your soul; believing yourself to be some wretched character who has been thrust into a profession you know not how, and that the day will come when you will be manifested as a hypocrite; crying to the Lord for some blessed testimony, and He never speaking one word; endeavouring to find your experience in the Scriptures of truth, and yet such a vail over the Bible that you are unable to realise anything sweet and savoury there. And yet unable to give up your religion. Trying to throw it away, yet it coming back again; going away distressed and grieved from chapel, and saying, “Oh, I will never go there again; I never get the least comfort to my soul,” and yet unable to stay away, as being more miserable at home than you would be there. But you cannot hasten the time. “The times and the seasons the Father has put in His own power” [Ac 1:7](#). But when the time comes to favour Zion none on earth or in hell can keep back that time, any more than they can prevent the sun from rising.

There is, then, “a time to heal”. And how is that healing effected? By some sweet discovery of mercy to the soul, by the eyes of the understanding being enlightened to see Jesus, and by the Holy Ghost raising up a measure of faith in the heart, whereby Christ is laid hold of, embraced in the affections, testified to by the Spirit, and enthroned within as “the hope of glory”. Not that I believe all the children of God have the same clear and striking deliverance. Not that I believe that all the living family can speak with equal decision and equal certainty how Christ was made precious to them. We often read in the accounts that gracious men have given of the Lord’s dealings with their souls, and hear ministers speak from the pulpit of very clear and marked deliverances. These are shining characters in the Church of God; their experience is a blessed testimony, and their sweet enjoyments and heavenly consolations are highly to be coveted; but I believe the generality of God’s children are not so powerfully and blessedly delivered, as to be able, at all times, to make it out to their own satisfaction, that they have been delivered from going down into the pit. But still there has been an indescribable sensation of pardon and peace dropped into their hearts; there has been a

transient visitation of mercy, like a cloud that passes hastily over the sky, and lets fall a refreshing shower, which, for a moment, cools the air, makes the flowers exhale fragrance, hangs the dew-drops upon every sparkling blade, and causes the grass to spring up with fresh verdure; but the next day comes, the shower is dried up, the flowers droop their heads, the grass is parched and withered, and every object seems to labour under the renewed heat; so passing and so transient was the cloud in its effects.

And thus with some of the living family who have received some testimony from the Lord. His favour, like the cloud of the latter rain, was so short and so transient that though it was accompanied with real gospel effects, though the dew-drops of mercy sparkled a while, yet they were soon dried up by the sun of temptation, soon exhaled by the winds that blew upon them from the four corners of the earth. And it is this speedy dissipation of enjoyment, this rapid drying up of the dew which makes many of God's people anxiously and seriously to question whether the consolation came from heaven or not.

But all through the Christian's life there will be "a time to kill, and a time to heal". We sometimes read in books, and hear in conversation, an experience of this kind—a work of grace commencing with very powerful convictions of sin, and the soul brought almost to the very brink of hell, and then a wonderful revelation of Jesus Christ, a powerful application of His atoning blood to the conscience, and a blessed manifestation of God's love to the soul. And then what follows? If we can credit their account, and they are not deceiving us, or not deceiving themselves, or if we do not misunderstand their statements, they possess an unwavering assurance during the remainder of their sojourning upon earth. Sin and Satan never distress nor wound them; the flesh lies calm and tranquil, like the summer sea, never lashed up by angry gusts into a storm of fretfulness and rebellion; the sea-birds of doubt and fear never flit with screams around them, as harbingers of a tempest, but the gale of divine favour gently fills their sail, and wafts them along till they reach the harbour of endless rest. Is this consistent with the Scriptures of truth?

Does not the Word of God set forth the path of a Christian as one of trial and temptation? Can a living soul ever pass through many scenes without being killed experimentally in his feelings as one of "the flock of slaughter?" Does not a chequered experience run through the whole of a Christian's life? Does the Scripture ever afford us the least warrant to believe that a man can be walking in the footsteps of a tempted, suffering Lord, who continues for months and years together at ease in Zion, without any trouble, exercise, grief, or distress in his soul? David never was there. Jeremiah never was there. Paul never was there. Heman never was there. Asaph never was there. You will

find that no saints of God, whose experience is left on record in the Bible, ever were there; but their path was one of change and vicissitude; sometimes down, sometimes up, sometimes mourning, sometimes rejoicing, but never long together in one unvaried spot.

The Spirit of the Lord, in carrying on this grand work in the hearts of God's people, will be continually operating in two distinct ways upon their souls. Jeremiah was a prophet of the Lord, and we read he was "set over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down," thus ran one part of his commission; "to build and to plant" [Jer 1:10](#) -that was the second part of his office. These two distinct operations were to run through the whole of his mission; they were "the burden of the Lord," laid upon him at his first call to the prophetic office, and they continued during the whole of his ministry, a space of more than forty years. Did he, then, merely on one occasion pull down, and on one occasion build up? Was not the whole of his ministration, as evidenced in the prophecies that are contained in the book that bears his name, a continual pulling down with one hand, and building up with the other? So is it then with the ministration of the Spirit of the Lord in a vessel of mercy. He is continually killing, continually healing, continually casting down, continually raising up, now laying the soul low in the dust of self-abasement, and now building it up sweetly in Christ.

iii But we pass on to another time-"a time to break down". The expression, "break down," implies that there is a building to be overthrown. What building is this? It is that proud edifice which Satan and the flesh have combined to erect in opposition to God, the Babel which is built up with bricks and lime, to reach the topmost heaven. But there is a time in God's hand to break down this Babel which has been set up by the combined efforts of Satan and our own hearts. Have we not all in our various ways set up some beloved idol, something which engaged our affections, something which occupied our thoughts, something to which we devoted all the energies of our minds, something for which we were willing to labour night and day? Be it money, be it power, be it the esteem of men, be it respectability, be it worldly comfort, be it literary knowledge, there was a secret setting up of self in one or more of its various forms, and a bowing down to it as an idol. The man of business makes money his god. The man of pleasure makes the lust of the flesh his god. The proud man makes his adored self his god. The Pharisee makes self-righteousness his god. The Arminian makes free-will his god. The Calvinist makes dry doctrine his god. The Antinomian makes the perversion of Scripture truth his god. All in one way or other, however they may differ in the object of their idolatrous worship, agree in this-that they give a preference

in their esteem and affection to their peculiar idol above the one true God of Israel.

There is, then, a “time to break down” these idols which our fallen nature has set up. And have not we experienced some measure of this breaking down, both externally and internally? Have not our idols been in a measure smashed before our eyes, our prospects in life cut up and destroyed, our airy visions of earthly happiness and our romantic paradises dissolved into thin air, our creature-hopes dashed, our youthful affections blighted, and the objects from which we had fondly hoped to reap an enduring harvest of delight removed from our eyes? And so as to our religion, has it not been broken down together with the things of the world? Our good opinion of ourselves, our piety and holiness, our resting upon texts of Scripture, our setting up our memory, our hanging upon the opinion of others, our wisdom and our knowledge, our understanding and our abilities, our consistency and uprightness, have they not all been broken down, and made a heap of ruins before our eyes, so that we are brought into this spot, not to have one stone upon the other which stands in its old place?

But there is “a **time** to break down”. The time cannot be delayed, the time cannot be hurried. You may sit under the most heart-searching ministers, but you will not be effectually broken down, until the Lord Himself breaks you down. You may be hugging yourself in prosperity and ease, and saying, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire” [Isa 44:16](#), and thus be “walking in the sparks of your own kindling;” but when the gust of the Lord’s anger blows out this temporary flame, you will not have “a sherd to take fire from the hearth” [Isa 30:14](#). You may think that you have passed through it sufficiently, and that there needs no repetition of the work of destruction and demolition; but if you are one of God’s children, you will have to be broken again and again both outwardly and inwardly, in your prospects, your expectations, and your idolatries, as well as in your frame and spirit before God.

You will never have any sweet communion with Jesus till your heart is broken to receive Him as a brokenhearted Lord. You will never have any tenderness and sympathy with a dying Saviour till your spirit is made contrite within you, so as to see and believe in an agonising Jesus. But when you are passing through these exercises, you seem not to have a grain of religion, not any one thing in your soul of which you can say, “This is the work of the Lord; I am sure I am a child of God; I feel the Spirit of adoption in me; I have a testimony which the devil himself cannot contradict—here is a sweet Ebenezer which I can look at with the greatest pleasure, and see that it was set up by God Himself in my soul. “No,” say you, “what I once thought religion, I have

come now to see was no religion at all. What I once highly esteemed I now look upon with disgust. What I once could lean upon, and prop up my soul with, and think would take me safe into eternity, I now see was only the deceits of the flesh and the delusion of Satan. Of all my sins my profession seems to be the greatest. I can look upon the street-pacing harlot, and think her nearer the kingdom of God than me. I can look upon those who are living in open profanity, and feel that their sins are not equal to mine: for I have been a presumptuous professor; I have touched the holy things of God with unholy hands. I have been thought more highly of by the people of God than there was any reason. I have gone amongst the family of God, have become a member of the church, and partaken of the ordinance. I have been looked upon as a child of God, and now I fear that I had not one grain of true religion, not one spark of vital godliness. And oh! my case seems to be so much more awful than that of any person of whom I have ever heard or read, that I tremble at times lest the wrath of God should be let loose, and the hurricanes of His fury sweep me into hell.

Now these are some of the feelings of a broken-down soul. Were you ever there? Was your lofty religion ever thus smashed? Did God Himself ever step forth into your hearts, and turn all your comeliness into corruption? I do not mean to say that all are broken down into the same depths of self-abasement, but you know nothing of being built up, unless you have been in a measure broken down; for the “time to break down” precedes the “time to build up”.

There is, then, “a time to build up,” but God will never put His glorious temple upon a rotten foundation. Who would think of building a palace upon the walls of a hovel? Who would put beautiful columns of marble, and all the splendid ornaments of the residence of a king, beside a pauper’s cottage? Shall such a wretched hut deface and defile the royal palace? Sweep it away: remove it out of sight-it is an eyesore to the king. So with our pauper-religion, our hovel of self-righteousness, our hut of creature-wisdom and creature-strength. It must be taken down, removed out of sight, and utterly swept away. That is what God does to our creature-religion. I trust God has done something of it to my religion; and that makes me so earnest in pulling down other people’s religion, as seeing how easily the devil has been able to blind me in times past; and knowing what delusions and devices I could rest upon, before the Lord brought me down, it makes me stretch forth my hand as the blind and fettered Samson, and lay hold of the pillars of the temple of creature-righteousness, that I may pull it down upon the heads of the worshippers of that idol.

(iv) There is “a time to build up”. This building up is wholly and solely in Christ, under the blessed Spirit’s operations. But what building up can there be in Christ, except the creature is laid low? What has Jesus, as an all-sufficient Saviour, to do with one who can stand in his own strength and his own righteousness? Such a one wants not Jesus Christ; He is only a nominal Saviour to him; he merely sees Christ in the Bible; he has only some dim speculation floating in his mind; but as to any experimental manifestation of Jesus to his soul, or any sweet communion with Him by the revelation of His love, he knows it not; nor can he know anything of Jesus experimentally, until he is brought into those exercises of soul to which, and to which alone, Christ is suitable.

But the Holy Ghost, when He has broken down a man’s religion, begins to “build up,” and as His covenant office is to take of the things of Christ and show them to the soul, He will only build him up by giving him a sight of Jesus; by showing him that all saving religion from first to last stands in an experimental acquaintance with Christ, that all his righteousness is in Christ, that all his acceptance is in Christ, that all his wisdom comes out of Christ, that all that he spiritually is in time, and all that he will be in eternity, springs out of an eternal union with Christ.

When, then, He raises up a sweet persuasion in a man’s conscience that he has an interest in Christ, when He brings into the heart one soft whisper that he stands complete in Christ, He builds him up. The temple rises up in a moment; it is not laboriously put together. It is not like the ancient temple, which was the work of many years to raise, and was put together stone by stone, though “neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, was heard in the house while it was in building” [1Ki 6:7](#) But the moment that God the Holy Ghost discovers the Lord of the temple, the temple rises to receive and lodge Him at once in all its fair proportions and complete harmony.

When the soul is built up in Christ, it wants no other religion but to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. It wants no other righteousness to recommend it to God, it wants no other salvation, nor title to eternal bliss. It wants no other hope but that which Jesus sweetly communicates; no other faith but that which He blessedly gives; no other love but that which He deigns to shed abroad. Being crucified with Christ, Christ lives in him; and the sum and substance of his religion is to live by the faith of the Son of God. The religion of the Holy Ghost is for us to be brought to enjoy the sweet testimony that we are Christ’s, and that Christ is ours.

And then, through the feeling effects of it in our souls, to be laid low in our own eyes, to be abased in our own sight, to have our consciences made tender and sprinkled from guilt and filth, and to spend our breath in praising and blessing His holy name.

But what a different way of building up this is from being built up in the Arminian method on the one hand, or the dead Calvinistic mode on the other! The Arminian says, “You must pray, strive, and do your best; you must be active in God’s cause; you must go about collecting money for the missionaries; you must be up and doing; and so in some way or other make yourself fit to receive the grace of God”. The dry Calvinist says, “Away with your doubts and fears, we will have none of that rubbish. Where do you find hope in the Bible? Believers are to rejoice always, and have done with sighs and groans. The gospel is all liberty and peace. Christ is everything, all in all-and therefore away with all your rubbish of experience”. So that the Arminian on the one hand pulls down the work of Christ to substitute creature-righteousness; and the dry Calvinist on the other pulls down the work of the Holy Ghost in the soul to build up a nominal Christ.

But the way in which the Spirit of God works is to lay the creature low, by bringing it into nothingness, and crushing it into self-abasement and self-loathing, so as to press out of it everything on which the creature can depend. Like a surgeon, who will run his lancet into the abcess, and let out the gory matter, in order to effect a thorough cure; so the Spirit of the Lord thrusting His sharp sword into the heart, lets out the inward corruption, and never heals the wound until He has thoroughly probed it. And when He has laid bare the heart, He heals it by pouring in the balmy blood of Jesus, as that which, by its application, cleanseth from all sin.

But, as was observed before, this breaking down and building up run parallel with a Christian’s life. As pride rises, it must be broken down. As self-righteousness starts up, it must be brought low. As the wisdom of the creature exalts itself against the wisdom of God, it must be laid prostrate. So that the work of the Spirit, continually going on in the conscience of a living soul, is breaking down and building up, breaking down and building up, breaking down and building up. When we are low, He will give us a lift; when we are high, He will pull us down; when we are secretly exalting ourselves, He will give us such a sight of our awful depravity and corruption, as shall lay us in the dust; when we are full of guilt and self-condemnation, He will sometimes raise us up by a discovery of salvation through the blood of the Lamb. So that the Spirit of the Lord,

carrying on His twofold operation in the hearts and consciences of God's children, will keep breaking down when needful, and building up when needful; and thus, in His own time and way, fits them for Jesus, as well as fills their souls with the love of Jesus.

(v) But there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance”. Does a man only weep once in his life? Does not the time of weeping run, more or less, through a Christian's life? Does not mourning run parallel with his existence in this tabernacle of clay? for “man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards”. Then “a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up,” must run parallel with a Christian's life, just as much as “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance”. Living souls will know many times to weep; they will have often to sigh and cry over their base hearts; to mourn with tears of godly sorrow their backslidings from God; to weep over their broken idols, faded hopes, and marred prospects; to weep at having so grieved the Spirit of God by their disobedience, carnality, and worldliness; to be melted into contrition at the feet of a dying Lord, so as in some measure to be led into the path in which Jesus walked as “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”.

They will have to bewail the falling off of those friends whom once they looked upon as bidding fairer for the kingdom of God than themselves; to weep at the cruel arrows of calumny which are shot against them by professors; to mourn over the low state of Zion, how few there are who really serve the Lord acceptably with reverence and godly fear, and adorn the doctrine in all things. But above all things will they have to weep over the inward idolatries of their filthy nature; to weep that they ever should have treated with such insult that God whom they desire to love and adore; that they should so neglect and turn their backs upon that Saviour who crowns them with lovingkindness and tender mercies; and that they bear so little in mind the instruction that has been communicated to them by the Holy Spirit.

There is many a weeping time for God's children; and if there be one frame of mind in soul experience more to be coveted than another, it is to be weeping at Jesus' feet. We have two sweet instances of the Lord's manifesting Himself to those who were weeping—one to “the woman which was a sinner,” who stood behind Him, and washed His feet with her tears; the other was to Mary Magdalene, who “stood without at the sepulchre weeping”. Oh, how different is the weeping, chastened spirit of a living

soul from the hardened, seared presumption of a proud professor! How different are the feelings of a broken-hearted child of God from the lightness, the frivolity, the emptiness, and the worldliness of hundreds who stand in a profession of religion! How different is a mourning saint, weeping in his solitary corner over his base backslidings, from a reckless professor who justifies himself in every action, who thinks sin a light thing, and who, however inconsistently he acts-never feels conscience wounded thereby. “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted” [Mt 5:4](#)

But there is “a time to laugh”-not carnally, not with vain mirth and frivolity; the Spirit of God does not mean that, but to laugh as Sarah laughed, when she had on her lap the infant Isaac; to laugh as Hannah, when her countenance was no more sad; to laugh as those whose “mouth was filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing,” when “the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion” [Ps 126:1-2](#) to laugh as one who has seen the tricks and stratagems of his enemy defeated.

This spiritual laughter is not one of unholy levity, but such as the Lord Himself intended, when He said, “Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh” [Lu 6:21](#) Spiritual laughter is to laugh inwardly in response to the smile of God; to laugh at seeing Satan baffled, and his temptations overthrown; to laugh at seeing that the way in which the Lord has led us, though it was a mystery to ourselves, has been a way most glorifying to Him.

Oh, how different is this inward laughter of the spirit from the outward laughter of the face! How different is it to laugh thus in some secret corner from exciting the smiles of a congregation, or laughing at some droll event through carnality and lightness of heart! Of carnal laughter and jocund merriment Solomon truly said that “it is mad” - [Ec 2:2](#) the hysteric laugh of the lunatic. But to be secretly smiling because the Lord smiles; to have an inward chuckling of spirit to see how Satan has laid his snares, and the Lord delivered us; to laugh at one’s enemy, at seeing how all his toils and stratagems have been defeated, is to imitate “the virgin, the daughter of Zion, who despised Sennacherib, and laughed him to scorn” [Isa 37:22](#) Thus to laugh inwardly, without any witness, seriously and in the spirit, is a very different thing from the broad grin of self-delighted humour; and however we may be betrayed into unbecoming levity and mirth, this spiritual laughter is that which the blessed Spirit alone sanctions.

(vi) But there is also “a time to mourn, and a time to dance;” we need indeed to mourn over our wretched hearts—that we are so carnal, so stupid, and so earthly; that we have so little power to resist our evil passions that are continually striving for the mastery; to mourn over our lightness, our frivolity, and our emptiness; to mourn over the things that will drop from our lips, whether we will or not; to mourn over the unsteadiness of our walk in the strait and narrow path; and to mourn over our many declensions, backslidings, and secret departures from the Lord. This is mourning-mourning in secret; mourning before the Lord; mourning on our midnight couch; mourning in our solitary chamber; mourning as we sit alone, because the hand of God is upon us.

And there is a “time to **dance;**” not with carnal revelry at the midnight ball, not with those amusements that the devil has invented in order to drown souls in everlasting perdition; but to dance as David danced before the ark. Not to dance as the daughter of Herodias, but as Miriam on the shore of the Red Sea; not the dancing of the children of Israel round the golden calf, but of “the virgin of Israel who goes forth in the dances of them that make merry” [Jer 31:4](#) The dancing of which the Psalmist speaks, “Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing” [Ps 30:11](#) that is, to dance with inward joy, to leap in one’s soul at the presence of the Lord, as the infant John leaped in his mother’s womb [Lu 1:41](#) to dance before the Lord with solemnity of spirit, and yet feeling such powerful emotions within, as though the heart would dance in one’s bosom.

Have you never felt, when the Lord dropped a sweet word of consolation into your conscience, what emotions filled your bosom beyond utterance, and how there was such an inward palpitation of soul, such an inward leaping of your heart in your bosom, that you could spiritually dance before the Lord, though it never affected one limb of your body, or broke out into open gestures? This, then, is the way in which the saints of old danced, and this is the way in which the saints dance now; not with carnal mirth, and wanton tripping of the feet, not with ungodly revelry, but in the inward spirit before God, dancing and leaping with joy to the praise of His name. “Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King; let them praise His name in the dance; let them sing praises unto Him with the timbrel and harp” [Ps 149:2-3](#)

But these times and seasons are in the Father’s hand; and “what God has joined together, let no man put asunder”. Never talk of healing, till you can talk of killing; never think of being built up, until you have been

broken down; never expect to laugh, until you have been taught to weep; and never hope to dance, until you have learned to mourn. Such only as are taught of God can enter into the real experience of these things; and into them, sooner or later, each according to his measure, does God the Holy Spirit lead all the ransomed family of Zion.