

CHAPTER 12

The wise and penitent preacher is here closing his sermon; and he closes it, not only like a good orator, but like a good preacher, with that which was likely to make the best impressions and which he wished might be powerful and lasting upon his hearers. Here is,

- I.** An exhortation to young people to begin betimes to be religious and not to put it off to old age (v. 1), enforced with arguments taken from the calamities of old age (v. 1-5). and the great change that death will make upon us (v. 6, 7).
- II.** A repetition of the great truth he had undertaken to prove in this discourse, the vanity of the world (v. 8).
- III.** A confirmation and recommendation of what he had written in this and his other books, as worthy to be duly weighed and concluded, with a charge to all to be truly religious, in consideration of the judgment to come (v. 13, 14).

~~2111~~ ECCLESIASTES 12:1-7

EXHORTATION TO EARLY PIETY

Here is,

I. A call to young people to think of God, and mind their duty to him, when they are young: *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.* This is,

1. The royal preacher's application of his sermon concerning the vanity of the world and every thing in it. "You that are young flatter yourselves with expectations of great things from it, but believe those that have tried it; it yields no solid satisfaction to a soul; therefore, that you may not be deceived by this vanity, nor too much disturbed by it, *remember your Creator*, and so guard yourselves against the mischiefs that arise from the vanity of the creature."

2. It is the royal physician's antidote against the particular diseases of youth, the love of mirth, and the indulgence of sensual pleasures, the vanity which childhood and youth are subject to; to prevent and cure this, *remember thy Creator*. Here is,

(1.) A great duty pressed upon us, to *remember* God as our *creator*, not only to remember that God is our Creator, that he *made us and not we ourselves*, and is therefore our rightful Lord and owner, but we must engage ourselves to him with the considerations which his being our Creator lay us under, and pay him the honour and duty which we owe him as our Creator. *Remember thy Creators*; the word is plural, as it is ^{<35>}Job 35:10, *Where is God my Makers?* For God said, *Let us make man*, us, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

(2.) The proper season for this duty — *in the days of thy youth*, the *days of thy choice* (so some), thy choice days, thy choosing days. “Begin in the beginning of thy days to remember him from whom thou hadst thy being, and go on according to that good beginning. Call him to mind when thou art young, and keep him in mind throughout all the days of thy youth, and never forget him. Guard thus against the temptations of youth, and thus improve the advantages of it.”

II. A reason to enforce this command: *While the evil days come not, and the years of which thou shalt say I have no pleasure in them.*

1. Do it quickly,

(1.) “Before sickness and death come. Do it while thou livest, for it will be too late to do it when death has removed thee from this state of trial and probation to that of recompence and retribution.” The days of sickness and death are *the days of evil*, terrible to nature, *evil days* indeed to those that have forgotten their Creator. These *evil days* will *come* sooner or later; as yet they *come not*, for God is *long-suffering to us-ward*, and gives us *space to repent*; the continuing of life is but the deferring of death, and, while life is continued and death deferred, it concerns us to prepare, and get the property of death altered, that we may die comfortably.

(2.) Before old age comes, which, if death prevent not, will come, and they will be *years of which we shall say, We have no pleasure in them*, — when we shall not relish the delights of sense, as Barzillai (^{<105>}2 Samuel 19:35), — when we shall be loaded with bodily infirmities, old and blind, or old

and lame, — when we shall be taken off from our usefulness, and our *strength* shall be *labour and sorrow*, — when we shall either have parted with our relations, and all our old friends, or be afflicted in them and see them weary of us, — when we shall feel ourselves die by inches. These *years draw nigh*, when *all that comes* will be *vanity*, the remaining months all months of vanity, and there will be *no pleasure* but in the reflection of a good life on earth and the expectation of a better life in heaven.

2. These two arguments he enlarges upon in the following verses, only inverting the order, and shows,

(1.) How many are the calamities of old age, and that if we should live to be old, our days will be such as we shall *have no pleasure in*, which is a good reason why we should return to God, and make our peace with him, *in the days of our youth*, and not put it off till we come to be old; for it will be no thanks to us to leave the pleasures of sin when they have left us, nor to return to God when need forces us. It is the greatest absurdity and ingratitude imaginable to give the cream and flower of our days to the devil, and reserve the bran, and refuse, and dregs of them for God; this is offering *the torn, and the lame, and the sick for sacrifice*; and, besides, old age being thus clogged with infirmities, it is the greatest folly imaginable to put off that needful work till then, which requires the best of our strength, when our faculties are in their prime, and especially to make the work more difficult by a longer continuance in sin, and, laying up treasures of guilt in the conscience, to add to the burdens of age and make them much heavier. If the calamities of age will be such as are here represented, we shall have need of something to support and comfort us then, and nothing will be more effectual to do that than the testimony of our consciences for us that we begin betimes to remember our Creator and have not since laid aside the remembrance of him. How can we expect God should help us when we are old, if we will not serve him when we are young? See ¹⁷¹⁷Psalm 71:17, 18.

[1.] The decays and infirmities of old age are here elegantly described in figurative expressions, which have some difficulty in them to us now, who are not acquainted with the common phrases and metaphors used in Solomon's age and language; but the general scope is plain — to show how uncomfortable, generally, the days of old age are. *First*, Then *the sun and the light* of it, *the moon and the stars*, and the light which they borrow from it, will be *darkened*. They look dim to old people, in consequence of

the decay of their sight; their countenance is clouded, and the beauty and lustre of it are eclipsed; their intellectual powers and faculties, which are as lights in the soul, are weakened; their understanding and memory fail them, and their apprehension is not so quick nor their fancy so lively as it has been; the days of their mirth are over (light is often put for joy and prosperity) and they have not the pleasure either of the converse of the day or the repose of the night, for both *the sun* and *the moon* are darkened to them. *Secondly*, Then *the clouds return after the rain*; as, when the weather is disposed to wet, no sooner has one cloud blown over than another succeeds it, so it is with old people, when they have got free from one pain or ailment, they are seized with another, so that their distempers are *like a continual dropping in a very rainy day*. The end of one trouble is, in this world, but the beginning of another, and deep calls unto deep. Old people are often afflicted with defluxions of rheum, like soaking rain, after which still more clouds return, feeding the humour, so that it is continually grievous, and therein the body, as it were, melts away. *Thirdly*, Then *the keepers of the house tremble*. The head, which is as the watch-tower, shakes, and the arms and hands, which are ready for the preservation of the body, shake too, and grow feeble, upon every sudden approach and attack of danger. That vigour of the animal spirits which used to be exerted for self-defence fails and cannot do its office; old people are easily dispirited and discouraged. *Fourthly*, Then *the strong men shall bow themselves*; the legs and thighs, which used to support the body, and bear its weight, bend, and cannot serve for travelling as they have done, but are soon tired. Old men that have been in their time *strong men* become weak and stoop for age, ^{<388>}Zechariah 8:4. *God takes no pleasure in the legs of a man* (^{<1470>}Psalm 147:10), for their strength will soon fail; but *in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength*; he has everlasting arms. *Fifthly*, Then *the grinders cease because they are few*; the teeth, with which we grind our meat and prepare it for concoction, cease to do their part, *because they are few*. They are rotted and broken, and perhaps have been drawn because they ached. Some old people have lost all their teeth, and others have but few left; and this infirmity is the more considerable because the meat, not being well chewed, for want of teeth, is not well digested, which has as much influence as any thing upon the other decays of age. *Sixthly*, *Those that look out of the windows are darkened*; the eyes wax dim, as Isaac's (^{<1071>}Genesis 27:1), and Ahijah's, ^{<1149>}1 Kings 14:4. Moses was a rare instance of one who, when 120 years old, had good eye-sight, but ordinarily the sight decays in old people as

soon as any thing, and it is a mercy to them that art helps nature with spectacles. We have need to improve our sight well while we have it, because the light of the eyes may be gone before the light of life.

Seventhly, The doors are shut in the streets. Old people keep within doors, and care not for going abroad to entertainments. The lips, the doors of the mouth, are shut in eating, because the teeth are gone and *the sound of the grinding* with them *is low*, so that they have not that command of their meat in their mouths which they used to have; they cannot digest their meat, and therefore little grist is brought to the mill. *Eightly,* Old people *rise up at the voice of the bird.* They have no sound sleep as young people have, but a little thing disturbs them, even the chirping of a bird; they cannot rest for coughing, and therefore rise up at cock-crowing, as soon as any body is stirring; or they are apt to be jealous, and timorous, and full of care, which breaks their sleep and makes them rise early; or they are apt to be superstitious, and *rise up* as in a fright, *at those voices of birds*, as of ravens, or screech-owls, which soothsayers call ominous. *Ninthly,* With them *all the daughters of music* are *brought low*. They have neither voice nor ear, can neither sing themselves nor take any pleasure, as Solomon had done in the days of his youth, in *singing men, and singing women, and musical instruments*, ²¹¹⁸Ecclesiastes 2:8. Old people grow hard of hearing, and unapt to distinguish sounds and voices. *Tenthly,* They are *afraid of that which is high*, afraid to go to the top of any high place, either because, for want of breath, they cannot reach it, or, their heads being giddy or their legs failing them, they dare not venture to it, or they frighten themselves with fancying that *that which is high* will fall upon them. *Fear is in the way*; they can neither ride nor walk with their former boldness, but are afraid of every thing that lies in their way, lest it throw them down.

Eleventhly, The almond-tree flourishes. The old man's hair has grown white, so that his head looks like an almond-tree in the blossom. The almond-tree blossoms before any other tree, and therefore fitly shows what haste old age makes in seizing upon men; it prevents their expectations and comes faster upon them than they thought of. Gray hairs are here and there upon them, and they perceive it not. *Twelfthly, The grasshopper is a burden and desire fails.* Old men can bear nothing; the lightest thing sits heavily upon them, both on their bodies and on their minds, a little thing sinks and breaks them. Perhaps *the grasshopper* was some food that was looked upon to be very light of digestion (John Baptist's meat was *locusts*), but even that lies heavily upon an old man's stomach, and therefore *desire fails*, he has no appetite to his meat, neither shall he

regard the desire of woman, as that king, ²¹¹³Daniel 11:37. Old men become mindless and listless, and the pleasures of sense are to them tasteless and sapless.

[2.] It is probable that Solomon wrote this when he was himself old, and could speak feelingly of the infirmities of age, which perhaps grew the faster upon him for the indulgence he had given himself in sensual pleasures. Some old people bear up better than others under the decays of age, but, more or less, the days of old age are and will be *evil days* and of little pleasure. Great care therefore should be taken to pay respect and honour to old people, that they may have something to balance these grievances and nothing may be done to add to them. And all this, put together, makes up a good reason why we should *remember our Creator in the days of our youth*, that he may remember us with favour when these *evil days come*, and his comforts may delight our souls when the delights of sense are in a manner worn off.

(2.) He shows how great a change death will make with us, which will be either the prevention or the period of the miseries of old age. Nothing else will keep them off, nor any thing else cure them. “Therefore *remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth*, because death is certainly before thee, perhaps it is very near thee, and it is a serious thing to die, and thou shouldst feel concerned with the utmost care and diligence to prepare for it.”

[1.] Death will fix us in an unchangeable state: *Man* shall then *go to his long home*, and all these infirmities and decays of age are harbingers of and advances towards that awful remove. At death *man goes* from this world and all the employments and enjoyments of it. He has gone for good and all, as to his present state. He has gone *home*, for here he was a stranger and pilgrim; both soul and body go to the place whence they came, v. 7. He has gone to his rest, to the place where he is to fix. He has gone *to his home, to the house of his world* (so some), for this world is not his. He has gone *to his long home*, for the days of his lying in the grave will be many. He has gone *to his house of eternity*, not only to his house whence he shall never return to this world, but to the house where he must be for ever. This should make us willing to die, that, at death, we must *go home*; and why should we not long to go to our Father's house? And this should quicken us to get ready to die, that we must then go to our *long home*, to an *everlasting habitation*.

[2.] Death will be an occasion of sorrow to our friends that love us. When *man goes to his long home the mourners go about the streets* — the real mourners, and those, as now with us, distinguished by their habits as they go along the streets, — the mourners for ceremony, that were hired to weep for the dead, both to express and to excite the real mourning. When we die we not only remove to a melancholy house before us, but we leave a melancholy house behind us. Tears are a tribute due to the dead, and this, among other circumstances, makes it a serious thing to die. But in vain do we *go to the house of mourning*, and see *the mourners go about the streets*, if it do not help to make us serious and pious mourners in the closet.

[3.] Death will dissolve the frame of nature and take down the earthly house of this tabernacle, which is elegantly described, v. 6. Then shall *the silver cord*, by which soul and body were wonderfully fastened together, *be loosed*, that sacred knot untied, and those old friends be forced to part; then shall *the golden bowl*, which held the waters of life for us, *be broken*; then shall *the pitcher* with which we used to fetch up water, for the constant support of life and the repair of its decays, *be broken*, even *at the fountain*, so that it can fetch up no more; and *the wheel* (all those organs that serve for the collecting and distributing of nourishment) shall be *broken*, and disabled to do their office any more. The body shall become like a watch when the spring is broken, the motion of all the wheels is stopped and they all stand still; the machine is taken to pieces; the heart beats no more, nor does the blood circulate. Some apply this to the ornaments and utensils of life; rich people must, at death, leave behind them their clothing and furniture of *silver* and *gold*, and poor people their earthen *pitchers*, and the drawers of water will have their *wheel broken*.

[4.] Death will resolve us into our first principles, v. 7. Man is a strange sort of creature, a ray of heaven united to a clod of earth; at death these are separated, and each goes to the place whence it came. *First*, The body, that clod of clay, *returns to its own earth*. It is made of *the earth*; Adam's body was so, and we are of the same mould; it is a house of clay. At death it is laid in *the earth*, and in a little time will be resolved into earth, not to be distinguished from common earth, according to the sentence (^{<1189>}Genesis 3:19), *Dust thou art and therefore to dust thou shalt return*. Let us not therefore indulge the appetites of the body, nor pamper it (it will be worms' meat shortly), nor let *sin reign in our mortal bodies*, for they are mortal, ^{<812>}Romans 6:12. *Secondly*, The soul, that beam of light, *returns to*

that *God* who, when he *made man of the dust of the ground, breathed into him the breath of life, to make him a living soul* (^{<017>}Genesis 2:7), and forms the spirit of every man within him. When the fire consumes the wood the flame ascends, and the ashes *return to the earth* out of which the wood grew. The soul does not die with the body; it is *redeemed from the power of the grave* (^{<015>}Psalm 49:15); it can subsist without it and will in a state of separation from it, as the candle burns, and burns brighter, when it is taken out of the dark lantern. It removes to the world of spirits, to which it is allied. It goes *to God* as a Judge, to give account of itself, and to be lodged either with *the spirits in prison* (^{<019>}1 Peter 3:19) or with *the spirits in paradise* (^{<023>}Luke 23:43), according to what was done in the body. This makes death terrible to the wicked, whose souls go to God as an avenger, and comfortable to the godly, whose souls go to God as a Father, into whose hands they cheerfully commit them, through a Mediator, out of whom sinners may justly dread to think of going *to God*.

^{<012>}ECCLESIASTES 12:8-12

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE

Solomon is here drawing towards a close, and is loth to part till he has gained his point, and prevailed with his hearers, with his readers, to seek for that satisfaction in God only and in their duty to him which they can never find in the creature.

I. He repeats his text (v. 8), 1. As that which he had fully demonstrated the truth of, and so made good his undertaking in this sermon, wherein he had kept closely to his text, and both his reasons and his application were to the purpose.

2. As that which he desired to inculcate both upon others and upon himself, to have it ready, and to make use of it upon all occasions. We see it daily proved; let it therefore be daily improved: *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*

II. He recommends what he had written upon this subject by divine direction and inspiration to our serious consideration. The words of this book are faithful, and well worthy our acceptance, for,

1. They are the words of one that was a convert, a penitent, that could speak by dear-bought experience of the vanity of the world and the folly of expecting great things from it. He was *Cohemoth*, one gathered in from his wanderings and gathered home to that God from whom he had revolted. *Vanity of vanities, saith the penitent.* All true penitents are convinced of the vanity of the world, for they find it can do nothing to ease them of the burden of sin, which they complain of.

2. They are the words of one that was wise, wiser than any, endued with extraordinary measures of wisdom, famous for it among his neighbours, who all sought unto him *to hear his wisdom*, and therefore a competent judge of this matter, not only wise as a prince, but wise as a preacher — and preachers have need of wisdom to win souls.

3. He was one that made it his business to do good, and to use wisdom aright. *Because he was himself wise*, but knew he had not his wisdom for himself, any more than he had it from himself, *he still taught the people that knowledge* which he had found useful to himself, and hoped might be so to them too. It is the interest of princes to have their people well taught in religion, and no disparagement to them to teach them themselves *the good knowledge of the Lord*, but their duty to encourage those whose office it is to teach them and to speak comfortably to them, ^{CHR2}2 Chronicles 30:22. Let not the people, the common people, be despised, no, not by the wisest and greatest, as either unworthy or incapable of good knowledge: even those that are well taught have need to be *still taught*, that they may grow in knowledge.

4. He took a great deal of pains and care to do good, designing to *teach the people knowledge*. He did not put them off with any thing that came next to hand, because they were inferior people, and he a very wise man, but considering the worth of the souls he preached to and the weight of the subject he preached on, he *gave good heed* to what he read and heard from others, that, having stocked himself well, he might *bring out of his treasury things new and old*. He *gave good heed* to what he spoke and wrote himself, and was choice and exact in it; all he did was elaborate.

(1.) He chose the most profitable way of preaching, by proverbs or short sentences, which would be more easily apprehended and remembered than long and laboured periods.

(2.) He did not content himself with a few parables, or wise sayings, and repeat them again and again, but he furnished himself with *many proverbs*, a great variety of grave discourses, that he might have something to say on every occasion.

(3.) He did not only give them such observations as were obvious and trite, but he *sought out* such as were surprising and uncommon; he dug into the mines of knowledge, and did not merely pick up what lay on the surface.

(4.) He did not deliver his heads and observations at random, as they came to mind, but methodized them, and *set them in order* that they might appear in more strength and lustre.

5. He put what he had to say in such a dress as he thought would be most pleasing: *He sought to find out acceptable words*, words of delight (v. 10); he took care that good matter might not be spoiled by a bad style, and by the ungratefulness and incongruity of the expression. Ministers should study, not for the big words, nor the fine words, but *acceptable words*, such as are likely to please men for their good, to edification, ⁴⁰³1 Corinthians 10:33. Those that would win souls must contrive how to win upon them with *words fitly spoken*.

6. That which he wrote for our instruction is of unquestionable certainty, and what we may rely upon: *That which was written was upright* and sincere, according to the real sentiments of the penman, even *words of truth*, the exact representation of the thing as it is. Those are sure not to miss their way who are guided by these words. What good will *acceptable words* do us if they be not *upright and words of truth*? Most are for smooth things, that flatter them, rather than right things, that direct them (²³⁰⁰Isaiah 30:10), but to those that understand themselves, and their own interest, *words of truth* will always be *acceptable words*.

7. That which he and other holy men wrote will be of great use and advantage to us, especially being inculcated upon us by the exposition of it, v. 11. Here observe,

(1.) A double benefit accruing to us from divine truths if duly applied and improved; they are *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness*. They are of use,

[1.] To excite us to our duty. They are as goads to the ox that draws the plough, putting him forward when he is dull and quickening him, to amend his pace. The truths of God *prick men to the heart* (^{<4127>}Acts 2:37) and put them upon bethinking themselves, when they trifle and grow remiss, and exerting themselves with more vigour in their work. While our good affections are so apt as they are to grow flat and cool, we have need of these *goads*.

[2.] To engage us to persevere in our duty. They are *as nails* to those that are wavering and inconstant, to fix them to that which is good. They are *as goads* to such as are dull and draw back, and *nails* to such as are desultory and draw aside, means to establish the heart and confirm good resolutions, that we may not sit loose to our duty, nor even be taken off from it, but that what good there is in us may be *as a nail fastened in a sure place*, ^{<4108>}Ezra 9:8.

(2.) A double way of communicating divine truths, in order to those benefits: —

[1.] By the scriptures, as the standing rule, the *words of the wise*, that is, of the prophets, who are called *wise men*, ^{<4134>}Matthew 23:34. These we have in black and white, and may have recourse to them at any time, and make use of them *as goads and as nails*. By them we may teach ourselves; let them but come with pungency and power to the soul, let the impressions of them be deep and durable, and the will *make us wise to salvation*.

[2.] By the ministry. To make the *words of the wise* more profitable to us, it is appointed that they should be impressed and fastened by the *masters of assemblies*. Solemn assemblies for religious worship are an ancient divine institution, intended for the honour of God and the edification of his church, and are not only serviceable, but necessary, to those ends. There must be masters of these assemblies, who are Christ's ministers, and as such are to preside in them, to be God's mouth to the people and theirs to God. Their business is to fasten the *words of the wise*, and drive them as *nails* to the head, in order to which the word of God is likewise as a *hammer*, ^{<429>}Jeremiah 23:29.

8. That which is written, and thus recommended to us, is of divine origin. Though it comes to us through various hands (many *wise men*, and many *masters of assemblies*), yet it is *given by one* and the same *shepherd*, the great *shepherd of Israel, that leads Joseph like a flock*, ^{<4801>}Psalms 80:1.

God is that one Shepherd, whose good Spirit indited the scriptures, and assists the *masters of the assemblies* in opening and applying the scriptures. *These words of the wise* are the true sayings of God, on which we may rest our souls. From that one Shepherd all ministers must receive what they deliver, and speak according to the light of the written word.

9. The sacred inspired writings, if we will but make use of them, are sufficient to guide us in the way of true happiness, and we need not, in the pursuit of that, to fatigue ourselves with the search of other writings (v. 12): “*And further, nothing now remains but to tell thee that that of making many books there is no end,*” that is,

(1.) Of *writing* many books. “If what I have written, serve not to convince thee of the vanity of the world, and the necessity of being religious, neither wouldst thou be convinced if I should write ever so much.” If the end be not attained in the use of those books of scripture which God has blessed us with, neither should we obtain the end, if we had twice as many more; nay, if we had so many that the whole world could not contain them (^{<425>}John 21:25), and much study of them would but confound us, and would rather be *a weariness to the flesh* than any advantage to the soul. We have as much as God saw fit to give us, saw fit for us, and saw us fit for. Much less can it be expected that those who will not by these be admonished should be wrought upon by other writings. Let men write ever so many books for the conduct of human life, write till they have tired themselves with much study, they cannot give better instructions than those we have from the word of God. Or,

(2.) Of *buying* many books, making ourselves master of them, and masters of what is in them, by much study; still the desire of learning would be unsatisfied. It will give a man indeed the best entertainment and the best accomplishment this world can afford him; but if we be not by these *admonished* of the vanity of the world, and human learning, among other things, and its insufficiency to make us happy without true piety, alas! there is no end of it, nor real benefit by it; it will weary the body, but never give the soul any true satisfaction. The great Mr. Selden subscribed to this when he owned that in all the books he had read he never found that on which he could rest his soul, but in the holy scripture, especially ^{<321>}Titus 2:11, 12. By these therefore let us be admonished.

~~2123~~ ECCLESIASTES 12:13-14

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE

The great enquiry which Solomon prosecutes in this book is, *What is that good which the sons of men should do?* ~~2113~~ Ecclesiastes 2:3. What is the true way to true happiness, the certain means to attain our great end? He had in vain sought it among those things which most men are eager in pursuit of, but here, at length, he has found it, by the help of that discovery which God anciently made to man (~~4333~~ Job 28:28), that serious godliness is the only way to true happiness: *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter*, the return entered upon the writ of enquiry, the result of this diligent search; you shall have all I have been driving at in two words. He does not say, *Do you hear it*, but *Let us hear it*; for preachers must themselves be hearers of that word which they preach to others, must hear it as from God; those are teachers by the halves who teach others and not themselves, ~~6123~~ Romans 2:21. Every word of God is pure and precious, but some words are worthy of more special remark, as this; the Masorites begin it with a capital letter, as that ~~0164~~ Deuteronomy 6:4. Solomon himself puts a *nota bene* before it, demanding attention in these words, *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter*. Observe here,

I. The summary of religion. Setting aside all matters of doubtful disputation, to be religious is to *fear God and keep his commandments*.

1. The root of religion is fear of God reigning in the heart, and a reverence of his majesty, a deference to his authority, and a dread of his wrath. *Fear God*, that is, worship God, give him the honour due to his name, in all the instances of true devotion, inward and outward. See ~~6443~~ Revelation 14:7.

2. The rule of religion is the law of God revealed in the scriptures. Our fear towards God must be taught by his commandments (~~2393~~ Isaiah 29:13), and those we must keep and carefully observe. Wherever the fear of God is uppermost in the heart, there will be *a respect to all his commandments* and care to keep them. In vain do we pretend to fear God if we do not make conscience of our duty to him.

II. The vast importance of it: *This is the whole of man*; it is all his business and all his blessedness; our whole duty is summed up in this and our whole comfort is bound up in this. It is the concern of every man, and

ought to be his chief and continual care; it is the common concern of all men, of their whole time. It is nothing to a man whether he be rich or poor, high or low, but it is the main matter, it is all in all to a man, to fear God and do as he bids him.

III. A powerful inducement to this, v. 14. We shall see of what vast consequence it is to us that we be religious if we consider the account we must every one of us shortly give of himself to God; thence he argued against a voluptuous and vicious life (^{<2119>}Ecclesiastes 11:9), and here for a religious life: *God shall bring every work into judgment.* Note,

- 1.** There is a judgment to come, in which every man's eternal state will be finally determined.
- 2.** God himself will be the Judge, God-man will, not only because he has a right to judge, but because he is perfectly fit for it, infinitely wise and just.
- 3.** *Every work* will then be *brought into judgment*, will be enquired into and called over again. It will be a day to *bring to remembrance every thing done in the body*.
- 4.** The great thing to be then judged of concerning *every work* is whether it be good or evil, conformable to the will of God or a violation of it.
- 5.** Even *secret things*, both good and evil, will be brought to light, and brought to account, in the judgment of the great day (^{<816>}Romans 2:16); there is no good work, no bad work, hid, but shall then be made manifest.
- 6.** In consideration of the judgment to come, and the strictness of that judgment, it highly concerns us now to be very strict in our walking with God, that we may *give up our account with joy*.