

Monergism

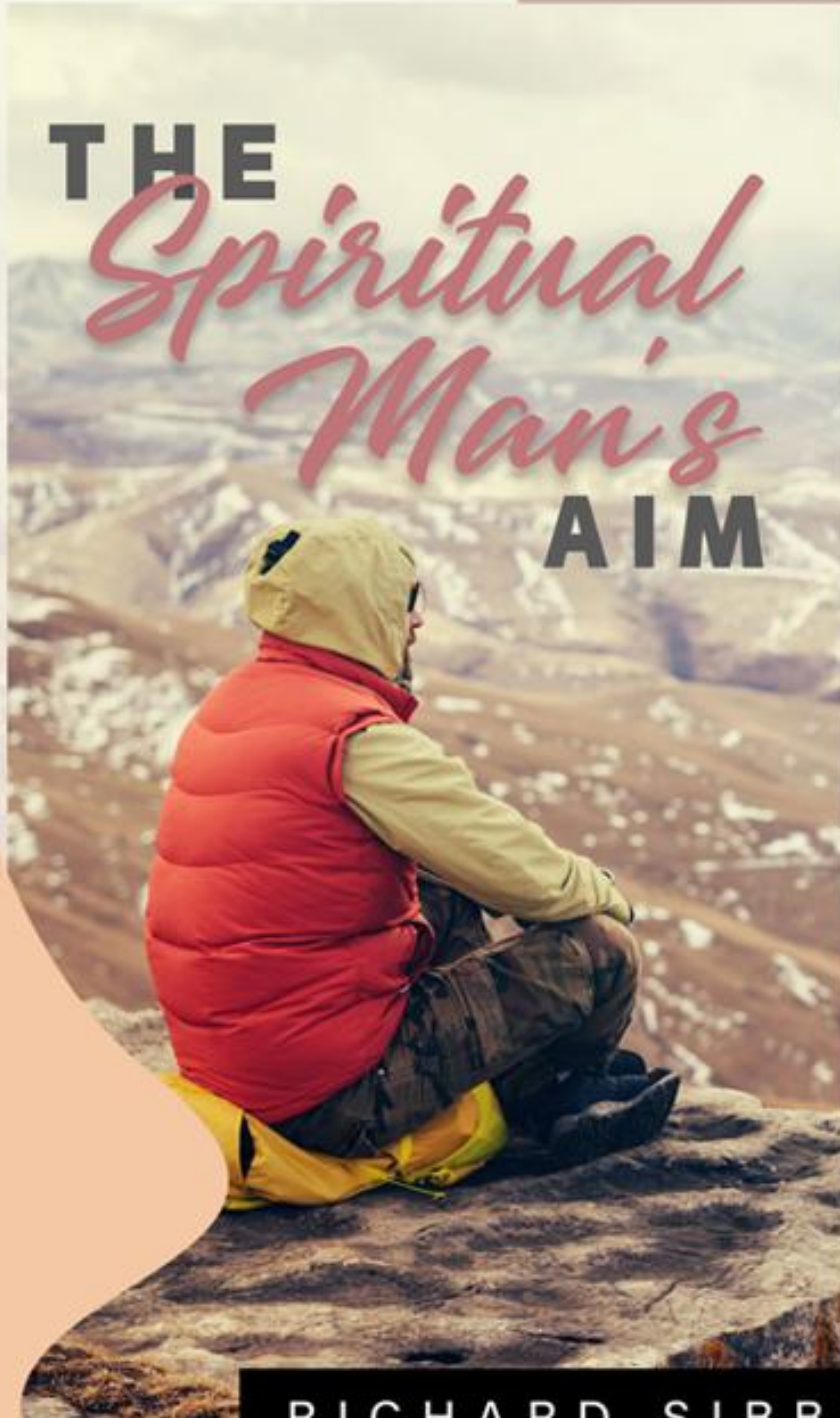
A person wearing a red puffy vest, a yellow hooded jacket, and dark pants is sitting cross-legged on a rocky ledge. They are looking out over a vast, hazy landscape of rolling hills and valleys. The sky is overcast and grey. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

THE
Spiritual
Man's
AIM

RICHARD SIBBES

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The Spiritual Man's Aim

by Richard Sibbes

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Introduction

It remaineth, brethren, the time is short: let those that have wives be as if they had none; and they that weep, as though they

wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.—1 COR. 7:29–31.

THE blessed apostle, in the former part of this chapter, had given direction in cases of conscience, being a man that had the tongue of the learned to speak a word in season to the weary, Isa. 1:4; whereupon, having in his eye greater matters, as his use is almost in every epistle, he calls them from particular cases, that they should not overmuch trouble themselves about them, but mind the main, 'The time is short: let those that are married be as if they were not,' &c. But yet, notwithstanding,

He gives satisfaction to the particular cases. For as, in travelling, it is not enough to know that a man's way lies east, or west, or north, or south, but he must know the turnings and windings, the particularities of the way; so in religion it is not enough to know that we must serve God above all, and love our neighbour as ourself, &c. Those generalities atheists will embrace, and in pretence of them shake off all further study of religion. Our knowledge must stand in clearing particular cases also, which, being cleared, the way is smoother to heavenward. Yet, notwithstanding, we must not dwell too much upon particulars, for here you see the apostle calls them off, 'Finally, my brethren, the time is short;' it remains that we look, to the main, &c. 'For the fashion of this world passeth away;' wherein we considered* two points in general, which I will only name, and hasten to that which followeth.

The first was this, that,

Doct. 1. A very good way to satisfy cases of conscience in particular, is to have in our mind the main.

For there be many that puzzle themselves all their life about this and that particular, and forget the main in the mean time. Let a man look to the main, and he will soon resolve in such particulars as these whether it be good to redeem time to hear a sermon now and then. He will do the thing, and not stand making a case of it; for when he considers how it helps to the main, the saving of his soul, &c., for which he came into the world, he will easily be resolved.

And so for sanctifying the Lord's day entirely; many have scruples and keep ado, but if they had the love of God in their souls, and did look to the main, they would see it to be an idle question. For how much conduceth it to the main?

And so for conversing with company, are they such as are comfortable and cheerful? Are they such as we may profit by? Why do I entangle myself and hinder the main? So we see Paul, in resolving the particulars, he calls them to the main: 'Brethren, the time is short,' and therefore be in these things as if ye were not (as we shall see anon in the particulars), 'for the fashion of this world passeth away.' This is the reason why none but a true Christian can carry himself moderately in the things of this world. Why? Because none but a sound Christian hath a main, and a chief end that sways the stern* of his whole life; he looks to heaven and happiness, and how it shall be with him afterwards, and he considers particulars thereafter; when another man of necessity must err in particular cases, because he hath not a gracious aim. You have no man but a Christian, but he loseth himself in the things of this world.

The second thing is this; you see that,

Doct. 2. Religion meddles with all matters.

With the world, with marriage, with buying, and possessing, as we shall see afterwards. Saith an atheist that stomachs it, that his ways

should be hindered from that commanding skill of religion which hath to do in all things, What hath the minister to do with our callings, with lawyers, with tradesmen, or statesmen? What hath the minister to do with these things?

It is true, not with the materials, with the particular matters of those callings. That is left to those that are artists, and that have skill in the particulars of their professions in each kind. But a minister and a Christian, and religion in any man, hath to deal with these things, as they help to further the main. For religion is a skill that fits a man for a further end, for his last end, for heaven.

Now, being such a skill, it must direct everything so far as it helps or hinders that. State knowledge, we say, is a commanding knowledge. Why? Because it meddles with all trades. How? Hath a statesman skill in this or that trade? No; not in the particular mystery, but he hath skill so far as he sees what may serve for the public good. Let the safety of the commonwealth be the law of all trades. The state knowledge is the supreme knowledge, which is for the good of the whole; therefore he cuts off particulars if they be mischievous to the whole. So all trades must be told of their faults, as they are blemishes to religion, for we must not be so in this or that trade, as that we forget we are Christians, and therefore we must hear meekly the word of God when it meets with our particular callings. We see Paul meddleth with buying and selling, with marriage, &c. How? As far as they might hinder the main: 'Finally, my brethren, the time is short, and the fashion of this world passeth away.' Therefore be not overmuch in these things.

It is the *suprema ratio*, &c., it is the main reason that makes for religion: as I said before of state knowledge, it is *suprema lex*. Yet though that be supreme in regard of inferiors, yet there is one above that, the chief reason of all that makes for religion; there be many particular reasons that make for this and that. Ay, but religion saith the contrary, and then that must rule, that is the *suprema ratio*. Now

I come to unfold the particulars. The apostle here stands upon five directions and bounds. Those five directions with three reasons:—

'Let those that are married be as if they were not.'

'Those that weep, as if they wept not.'

'Those that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not.'

'And they that buy, as though they possessed not.'

'And they that use this world, as not abusing it.'

How are these five directions enforced?

They are enforced from three reasons:—

The first is in the front of the text: 'The time is short.' Therefore be moderate in all things here.

The second is in the shutting up of the text: 'For the fashion of this world passeth away.'

The third reason is a main reason too, that is, from their state and condition in Christ: 'Why, brethren,' saith he, 'partakers of the heavenly calling,' Heb. 3:1, as he saith in another place, 'Partakers of better things,' 2 Cor. 1:7, and by being 'brethren,' 'brethren in Christ,' 'members of Christ.' He is the knot of the brotherhood, being born again 'sons of God;' 'brethren of Christ,' not brethren only among yourselves, but 'brethren in Christ,' and so sons of God and heirs of heaven. What! for you to be immoderate in the things of the world. Paul wraps up a moving reason, not only to insinuate to gain their affections, 'Oh! my brethren,' but to add a force of reason likewise. 'Brethren, the time is short.' And, brethren, 'the fashion of this world passeth away.' So add these three reasons to the five directions, and see how strongly Paul backs his directions. Indeed, it was needful for Paul so to do. We are so desperately set on the things of this world,

we are so hardly taken off, that there must be reason upon reason; for the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit of God, loves not waste of reasons, to spend them where there is no use. And therefore we must think it is a weighty point, and of great equity, that we give ear to these directions.

We must remember that every one of these reasons has a force in every direction. You that have wives, be as if you had none, for the 'time is short,' and 'the fashion of the world passeth away.' And so you that weep, as if you wept not, 'for the time is short, and the fashion of the world passeth away.' And you are 'brethren,' you that 'use the world, as not abusing it,' for 'the time is short, and the fashion of the world passeth away.' So that all these reasons must be thought on in every particular direction that I speak of, only in general. I will speak a little of the first reason, 'The time is short.'

What time?

(1.) The time of the world. There is but a little time before the day of judgment. Christ is at hand to judge the quick and the dead. The time between this and that is short. It was short then, it is shorter now. 'The time is short.' We are fallen into the latter end of the world. But that is not all.

(2.) The time is short of our little world; our particular judgment is near at hand. It shall be with us at the latter day as it is when we die. Our time is short; the time of our particular life is short, and that is more forcible to persuade us 'the time is short.'

(3.) The season of the time, which is the prime time. The season and opportunity of time is shorter than the time of life; for we have not opportunity of time all our life. 'The time is short;' that is,

[1.] The advantage of doing good and of taking good is short. All the year is not harvest or seed-time. It is not always tide; it is not always sunshine. And as it is in nature, so it is in the spiritual state of things; we have not always advantages and opportunities; we have not

always gales. Opportunity therefore is shorter than time, as our time is shorter than the time of the world. 'The time is short;' the opportunity and season of time is shorter.

[2.] Ay, and uncertain; we cannot tell how short. If it were told any of us here that within two days he shall die, it would startle us, the best of us all; it would make us look about us: but who of us all knows certainly that he shall live two hours? The time, as it is short, so it is uncertain, and here is the wondrous folly of our nature, that we will take so much time to come in trust, as though we should live so long, and make a covenant with death. But one party cannot make a covenant. God and the time to come make no covenant with us. Therefore it is extremity of folly to say, I will live so long, and so long. 'Thou fool,' saith God, when he projected for a long time and had treasure laid up for many years, 'Thou fool, this night they shall take thy soul,' Luke 12:20. A man is a fool when he makes account of continuing that he hath no promise of. And therefore the time being short, and uncertain too, take it while we may catch hold of it, especially the opportunity of time.

[3.] And in the third place, it is irrecoverable when it is gone. There is no recalling back of time when it is past. In all these respects we must be good husbands; we must be thrifty of our time, and not take care how to drive away that, that flies away of itself so fast. It is a precious thing, precious for great purposes. What is this little time given us for? To provide for eternity, world without end. And we trifle it away about this thing and that thing to no purpose; we fill it up with vanity, and with sin, which is worse. In this little time we do that, that in a long time we cannot undo again. That is our madness and folly. Therefore 'the time being short,' let us take heed what we do in it. We may do that in a little time that we may rue for eternity. We may do that good, and get that good in a little time, that may stand by us world without end. Those that have but a little plot of ground, they will husband it so, as not to lose a handful of it; so those that have but a little time, let them husband it well, sow to the Spirit, that our harvest may be eternal life; that we may say, Oh! it was a

great blessing, that God gave me a little time to get into Christ, to repent of my sins, &c. Beloved, there are three main parts of this little time:

Past, present, to come.

(1.) The time that is gone; let us repent of it, if it have not been spent well. That is the best use we can make of the time past; for there is nothing to be done in the time that is past. But if things have been done ill, repent.

(2.) The time present is to do good in; and for the time to come, it is out of our power; and therefore even for the present we must work. The time past; the best use we can make of it, is to comfort ourselves, as Hezekiah, in our sincerity, Isa. 38:3, or to repent if anything have been done amiss. But look to the present, put not off, do the work for which we came into the world, presently. 'The time is short,' the journey is long, the business is great. It is a great journey from earth to heaven; it is a great matter to get from earth to heaven.

(3.) Now having such business as to go to heaven, let us, I beseech you, consider the weight of the business, and give our eyes no sleep, nor our eyelids slumber, till we are gotten into such a state and condition as is not liable to time; let us make this special use of precious time. Those that are young, let them be advised to take time along with them, which is to be esteemed far above gold, and consecrate the prime and the flower of their time to God and to the best things; especially considering, that we have no assurance of this time. And those that are old, that through age are going into the grave, let them not neglect their time. A young man, as we say, may die soon; an old man cannot live long. And therefore let those that are stricken in years be put in mind to think that their time is shorter than others'. All men's times are short, old men's shortest. Let those therefore think of this, 'The time is short.' Our, folly is this, we make it shorter than it is by our 'Vanity, vanity.' It were well if it were only vanity. By sinful and intemperate courses many shorten their days,

and so are felons upon themselves; or by their wickedness, they give God occasion to shorten them. 'A bloodthirsty and cruel man shall not live out half his days,' Ps. 55:23. God meets with him. So 'the time is short,' and we make it shorter. We are guilty of the shortness of it. Let us take heed of that. But I have been over long in this point; only because it is the prime reason, set before all the particulars, I beseech you consider, 'the time is short.' If we do not make use of it we are worse than the devil himself; he makes use of the shortness of his time. What doth he? 'Because the time is short,' he doth all the mischief he can, Rev. 12:12. He fills up his time to increase his kingdom; he doth all the mischief he can, for this reason; because his time is short. Let us learn somewhat of the worst of spirits. But that which it serves for in particular here, is this; we have many things to do, and the time being short, let us be sure we do the main thing that we come for, and other things as they help the main, and not hinder it. The time is short, and we have many businesses to do; let us be sure that we do our business, so as that we leave not the main undone. That is the thing he aims at here. 'The time is short.'

'It remains that those that have wives be as if they had none.'

1. That is the first particular; for before they had asked him cases of conscience about marriage, and that makes him speak of it. All the particulars have dependence one upon another. Those that marry will have occasion to weep, that is next, for there will be cause. There will be loss of husband, or wife, or child, and there is somewhat always; family crosses attend upon marriage. And therefore he adds weeping after marriage.

And then because there is joy. 'A woman brings forth in sorrow, but she joys when a man child is born,' as Christ speaks, John 16:21. There is joy in children, and there is a mutual joy in that sweet conjugal friendship, there is much joy; and therefore as there is weeping, so there is joy in marriage.

'And those that buy, as if they possessed not.' There must be buying where there is wife and children; there must be looking to posterity; and then all this enforceth, 'using of the world.' And men when they enter into that estate, they enter into the world; as we use to say, they begin the world anew. They enter into the world; for there are many things necessary to maintain that society. Therefore we see one thing depends upon another. He joins all together, aiming especially at one thing, at that kind of life especially.

Now in every one of these particulars, he gives a liberty to do the thing. You may marry, you may weep, you may joy, you may buy, you may use the world. But as there is a liberty, so there is a danger; you may, but you may not go too far. And therefore with a liberty he gives a restraint. Do them, but take heed you overdo them not. And this restraint is backed with reason; he hath reason for his restraint. 'The time is short;' and therefore there is danger, lest you shoot yourselves too far, lest you pass too deep into these things. 'And the fashion of this world passeth away;' all things here pass away. Therefore it is in vain for you to be overmuch in those things that are passing things.

And then you are, brethren, called to greater matters; so there is a liberty, a danger, and a restraint upon the danger; and likewise a reason to back it in every particular.

(1.) The liberty: We may marry. It is not questioned. There is not only a liberty, but it is an honourable estate, and necessary; honoured in paradise, honoured by Christ's presence; a liberty by which the church is upheld, heaven is increased. It was the devil that brought in a base esteem of that honourable condition. In popery, they rather will be the members of an harlot, than the head of a wife. It was the devil that brought in those abominable opinions and writings to disparage that honourable condition, and so it must be thought.

(2.) But there is a danger; and that is the main thing. You that have wives, 'be as if you had none.' There is a great danger in a double

respect. A danger in the things, and a peril if we go too far in them. That is, there is a great hazard, and we shall go overfar in that condition, and a danger that it tends to.

For instance, those that have wives, have they not been drawn away by their wives, as Solomon was, to idolatry? 1 Kings 11:4. Is there not a danger of being drawn away? And in being drawn away is there not a hazard to our souls? Did not sin come in that way? Was not Adam led away by his wife? And how many men perish by being too uxorious,* by being too flexible in that kind? If they had remembered the apostle's precept to marry as if they had not, they would not have been so drawn away. Because there is a danger, there is a restraint: 'Let those that have wives be as though they had none.' What! to use them as if they had none? To care for them as if they had none? No; that is not the meaning; 'but to be as if they had none.' That is, let them be as resolute for God's truth, as if they had no wives to hinder them; let them be as willing to suffer crosses, if God call them, as if they had none; let them be as ready to good duties, if it fall within their calling, as if they had none; let them avoid distracting cares, and worldly incumbrances, as if they had none; let them not pretend their marriage for baseness and worldliness, and for avoiding of crosses and afflictions when God is pleased to call them unto them; let them not pretend marriage for their doubling in religion and dissembling, 'I shall undo my wife and children,' 'Let them be as if they had none,' for Christ hath given us direction to hate all for Christ. A man is not worthy of Christ and of religion, that undervalues not wife and children and all, for the gospel. If things stand in question, whether shall I stick to them or to Christ, my chief husband; I must stick to Christ. The reason is, the bond of religion is above all bonds. And the bond that binds us to Christ it abides when all bonds cease; for all bonds between husband and wife, between father and children, they end in death; but the bond of Christ is eternal. Every bond must serve the main bond; and therefore we must not pretend this and that to wrong Christ and religion, which is the main bond. We must so labour to please others, that we displease not our chief husband. For the time will be, when we shall neither

marry, nor be given in marriage, but we shall be as the angels, Mat. 22:30; and that time shall be without bounds and limits, for eternity; and we must look to that. And therefore those that marry, 'let them be as if they were not married.' You know how it fared with them in the gospel, that pretended this, for his not coming to Christ; he that was married saith, 'I cannot come.' His excuse was more peremptory than the rest, 'he could not.' Could not this excuse him?* And will pretending this excuse men when they are called to duties? There is that disproportion so much between Christ, our chief husband, and any other, though it be the wife of our bosom, or the children of our loins (the one having redeemed us, and is our best husband, a husband for eternity in heaven), that no excuse will serve the turn for a man to wrong the bond of religion for any bond whatsoever. And therefore you know the peremptory answer to him that pretended that excuse, 'You shall never taste of my feast,' Luke 14:24.

'And those that weep, as though they wept not.'

2. It is lawful to weep, not only for sin—that should be the main—but likewise to weep for the miseries of the time and state we live in. There is a liberty here, 'Oh that my head were a fountain of tears,' saith Jeremiah. 9:1. He thought he could not weep enough; and therefore he wished that his head were 'a fountain.' He thought his tears would soon be dry. 'Oh that my head were a fountain,' so that there is a liberty to weep. Nay, men are bound to weep. There are tears of sympathy for the misery of the state and time we live in. And so for family losses and crosses. We are flesh, and not spirit; and God hath made us men, and hath given us sensible apprehensions of grief; and it is a cursed temper to be without natural affection. We may weep, and we may grieve; nay, we ought to grieve.

Now grief is as it were a cloud from whence the shower of tears comes, and weeping is but a distillation of that vapour.

If we may grieve and ought to grieve for the times; and it is a stupid temper not to apprehend the miseries of the state and times we live in; if we may grieve, we may weep. That is put for the spring whence weeping comes. For grief itself, there is a liberty, no question of that; we may weep, but we must weep as if we wept not: for there is a danger in weeping over-much for any crosses. Here is a danger, for we may flatter our grief too much for wives and children. God takes it ill; he takes it unkindly; that when Christ himself is a perpetual husband, and God is an everlasting Father, that we should weep and grieve too much for the loss of father, or of wife, or of child. For is not God worth all? So there is a danger that naturally we are prone to over-grieve, when we do grieve, as we are to over-joy when we do joy. For our nature can hardly keep bounds; and God takes it unkindly when we do so, when we over-grieve; for it is a sign we fetch not that comfort from him that is the spring and fountain, that we should do. And therefore let those that weep be as if they wept not. That is, not over-much. 'For the time is short.' Dost thou lose any friend, or any thing? 'The time is short,' we shall meet again. There is but little time between this and the latter judgment, 'and the fashion of this world passeth away.' There will be a new world, a new heaven, and a new earth. And then we shall 'live for ever with the Lord.'

And then, my 'brethren.' Why? 'Brethren' should not be without hope of the resurrection, as the Gentiles are. They may weep that never think to see one another again. But a Christian, a brother, that hath hope of meeting again, let not him weep as without hope; 'so let us weep, as if we wept not.' So he lays a restraint upon that; nay, though our weeping be for sin, there must be a moderation in that, for we may over-grieve. We are bound to joy in the Lord, and alway to rejoice. And therefore we must weep for sin, so as we must remember to joy. We must with one eye look upon our sins to humble us, and to look upon our hearts to grieve; but with the other eye we must look upon God's mercy in Christ to comfort us again. The best grief of all, that must be moderate; much more, grief for any earthly thing.

Now, when we are tempted to over-grieve for any earthly thing, the best way is diversion.* Do I grieve for these? Ay, but is my soul as it should be? Let me weep over my dead soul, as Christ wept over Lazarus when he was dead. Let me weep over my dull soul, let me weep over that.

As physicians, when the blood runs too much one way, they give an issue another way; so let us turn our grief the right way. How is it with us? Is the life of grace there? Is reckonings even between God and my soul? Am I fit to end my days? Am I in a state fit for heaven? Then we shall weep for something. It is pity such pearls as tears should be lost. God hath no bottles for tears that are shed over-much for the things of the world. But if they be for our sins, and the sins of the time we live in, and for the ills and miseries of the state that are on us, and hang over our heads, then let us weep to purpose; turn our grief the right way; and then let us grieve amain, if we will, so our grief run in that channel.

'Those that joy, as if they did not.'

3. Joy we may and we ought; for God envies not our joy. He hath given us wherewith in this life to joy, abundance of comforts of all sorts for all our senses, flowers and colours, &c. We have nothing in soul or body but it hath objects to delight in. God hath made himself for the soul to delight in, and there is somewhat to delight us in every creature. So sweet is God, we may and ought to rejoice. God gives us wife and children to rejoice in: 'Rejoice in the wife of thy youth,' Prov. 5:18. There is no question of a liberty in these things.

But then there is a danger, especially in sweet affections. There is danger, because we are like to over-joy. And poison is the subtlest conveyed in sweet things. We are prone to over-joy. There is a danger; therefore there must be a restraint. 'We must joy as if we rejoiced not;' that is, so joy, in any thing here, as considering that 'the time is short,' I cannot enjoy it long. Shall I joy in that I cannot

enjoy? 'The time is short.' I cannot enjoy them. If a man cannot enjoy a thing long, he cannot joy. 'The time is short;' you must go. The things must go, and both must go. 'And the fashion of this world passeth away.' All the frame of things pass away; marriage passeth away; callings and friends pass away; and all pass away. I beseech you, let us learn to joy as if we rejoiced not. The prophet calls Nineveh a rejoicing city, Jonah 3:3, and we live in a jovial age. Men eat and drink as they did in the days of the old world, in Noah's time; they marry and give in marriage, Mat. 24:37; and therefore we had need to lay some restraint upon our joy: especially when God calls us to mourning as well as joy, as he doth if we look round about us. If we look upon the time, we shall see cause to joy as if we did not. We must not always be on the merry pin, as we say, but we must temper and qualify our joy.

Now, considering that the apostle adds, weeping, grieving, and joy, you see that

Religion is especially in moderating the affections.

Religion is purging the affections from the evil that is in them, and moderating them, if they be lawful and good; and therefore think not that you are religious enough if you know a great deal, as many Christians are very greedy of knowing, and yet if you look to their lives, their grief and joy is intemperate; they have not learned to bridle and to school their affections. You see that religion is in moderating of grief and joy in earthly things. Let us see men shew the power of religion in bearing of crosses, so that 'they weep as if they wept not;' and in bearing prosperity so as they can learn to abound, to joy as if they rejoiced not. That man hath learned religion to purpose; for religion is especially about the affections. For we are good if we joy well and grieve well, but not if we know much. The devil knoweth more than we. Therefore, especially labour, that God would vouchsafe grace to govern the affections, that we may know how to grieve and how to joy; as naturally indeed we do not.

And then we see here another point, which now I add, that

The affections of God's people are mixed.

They so weep as that it is mingled with joy, and their joy is mingled with weeping. 'They weep as if they wept not,' 'they joy as if they joyed not.'

A carnal man is in simples altogether. If he joy, he thrusts the house out of the window, as we say. If he be merry, he is mad; he hath no bounds. If he be sorrowful, if somewhat restrain him not, he sinks like a beast under his sorrow, as Nabal did, 1 Sam. 25:37, 38, for he hath no grace to temper his sorrow and to temper his joy; and, therefore, he is over-sorrowful or over-jocund. Ah! but grace, considering that we have objects of both, doth temper the affections. A Christian, when he joys, he doth not over-joy, for he hath cause at that time to mourn for somewhat; and when he grieves, he doth not over-grieve, for he hath somewhat then to joy in; for Christ is his, and heaven is his, and the providence of God to direct all for good is his still; he hath somewhat to joy in at the worst. And therefore all his affections are tempered and qualified. So much for that point.

'And they that buy, as if they possessed not.'

4. It is lawful to buy. It is lawful to make contracts; and propriety* is lawful. Every man ought to have his own. There were no theft if there were no propriety, nor there could be no works of mercy. Now, if propriety and dominion of things be lawful, that we may possess things as our own, then buying is lawful. That is one way of contract of making things our own; there is no danger in that. But there is a danger in the manner of buying. Men buy to perpetuate themselves: 'They call their lands after their names,' Ps. 49:11, and they think to continue for ever. God makes fools of them; for how few have you that go beyond the third generation? How few houses have you that

the child, or the grandchild can say, This was my grandfather's and my great-grandfather's? How few houses have you, that those that are now in them can say, My ancestor dwelt here, and these were his lands? Go over a whole country, few can say so.

Men when they build, together with building in the earth, they build castles in the air; they have conceits. Now I build for my child, and for my child's child. God crosses them. Either they have no posterity, or by a thousand things that fall out in the world, it falls out otherwise. 'The time is short, and the fashion of this world passeth away;' that is, the buildings pass away, the owning passeth away, all things here pass away: and therefore buy as if you possessed not, buy so as we neglect not the best possession in heaven, and so possess these things, as being not possess[ed] and commanded of them.

In Lev. 25:8, there you see the year of Jubilee was that all possessions might return again, if men would. God trained them up by this, to teach them that they should not think of inheriting things long that they bought, for it returned in the year of Jubilee, in the fiftieth year. So we must learn that we cannot possess things long. Though we possess them ourselves, we may be thrust out by fraud or tyranny. Therefore 'let those that buy be as though they did not possess.' Jer. 22:23 he saith, 'Thou makest thy nest in the cedars,' and thinkest it shall be thus and thus with thee. Oh! beloved, let us not build and dwell in our hopes and assurance upon that which will yield no certain hope and assurance in this world. 'For the fashion of this world,' as we shall see hereafter, 'passeth away.'

And then for 'brethren' that have an inheritance in heaven; for them to buy as if they should live here for ever! 'Brethren,' that is a reason to take them off. 'Brethren, buy as if you possessed not.' Thus much of the four directions.

**'They that use the world, as not abusing
it.'**

5. We may use the world, while we are here in it, for we cannot want the things of this life. We are members of two worlds while we are here. We are members of this world, and we are heirs of a better; we have relation to two worlds.

Now while we live in this world we must use the things of this world. How many things doth this poor life need while we are in this world! While we are passengers we must have things to help us in the way to heaven. Passengers must have necessaries; there is no question of that. And therefore we must use the world many ways.

'As not abusing it.'

There is danger in using the world; there is a danger of cleaving in your affections to the things of this world, so much as that we forget a better world; and therefore we should use it as not abusing it.

How should we use it?

Why, use this world as laying a foundation for a better world. While we live here, use the world as we may further our reckonings for a better. Use the things of the world as we may express some grace in the using of it. Use the world as that the using of it may comfort us when the thing passeth. The 'world passeth.' But let us use the world, as that the grace that we express in the use of it may continue. Use the world to the honour of God, to the good of others, to the increase of our reckoning; abuse it not to the dishonour of God; fight not against God with his own blessings. That is to abuse the world. Forget not God the giver. Were it not an unkind thing if a man should invite strangers, if they should turn their kind friend that had invited them out of doors? And so it is to use the things of the world so as to turn God out of our hearts that gives all. Turn not the things of this world against God, or against others, to make them weapons of injustice, to be great to ruin others. Abuse them not to wrong, and to pierce our own souls, as the apostle saith, 'with cares and the like,' 1 Tim. 6:10. This is to abuse the world, when we dishonour God and

wrong others, or to pierce our own souls. God hath not given us the things of this world for this end, to hurt ourselves with them. And therefore together with the things, let us desire a gracious use of them, for it is better than the thing itself. Labour to use them as not abusing them, as we shall if we have not grace to use them well. Many have the gifts of God without God, because they have not his grace. When we have the gifts of God, desire grace to manage them well. To his children God gives this with the other; he never gives them anything, but he gives them grace to make a sanctified use of it. They are sanctified to all things, and all things are sanctified unto them. 'Use the world as not abusing it.' The reason is strong, 'The time is short.' Why should we be overmuch in using the things of this world; for that is one way of abusing the things of this world. 'The time is short.' We must be pulled from them whether we will or no. And therefore let us wean ourselves. And then, 'the fashion of this world passeth away.' Why should we doat upon a perishing fashion? All things here pass away, and a new fashion comes after. You, 'brethren,' that are heirs of a better world, use this 'world as not abusing it.' 'Brethren,' he puts them in mind of a higher calling. And so I come to the last.

'For the fashion of this world passeth away.'

6. That is the second reason. The schema,* that is, the apparition of this world, the outward fashion, the outward view and hue of the things of this world, pass away. It is a notable diminishing word in the original, as if the world were not a substance, but a fashion, schema. As we say in philosophy, in the air there are apparitions and substances; as there are flying horses sometimes and fighting men in the air. These are not substances, but apparitions of things. It is but phasis, but an apparition, or shape. The substance and true reality of these things is another matter. So whatsoever is in the world, it is but an apparition. When the devil shewed Christ all the kingdoms of the

world, he shewed him but an apparition, but a show of things. There is a diminishing in the word 'show' (a).

And then in the word 'fadeth away.'

'The fashion of this world passeth away;' or, as some translate it, 'deceives, and turns us aside' (b). And so it doth indeed from better things. 'The fashion of this world passeth away.' That translation is fit enough. 'It passeth.away.' Now shall we be immoderate in anything that passeth away? It is but an apparition, but a show, but a pageant. The word is partly taken from a pageant, or a show that hath a resemblance of this and that. But there is no reality or substance in a pageant. From this,

Use 1. Learn to conceive aright of the things of this life, that there is no reality in them to speak of. They have a kind of reality. Riches are in some sort riches, and beauty is in some sort beauty, and nobility is in some sort nobility, and so possessions are in some sort possessions. But all this is but a pageant as it were, as a man that acts in a pageant, or in a play; he is in some sort a king, or a beggar for the time. But we value him not as he is then, but as he is when he is off the stage. And while we live here, we act the part, some of a rich man, some of a nobleman, some of a beggar or poor man; all is but an acting of a part (c). And there is a less proportion between the acting of a part in this life, than there is between our life and eternity. All is but the acting of a part. We are not rich in the grave more than others. The king is as poor in the grave as the base peasant; his riches follow him not. The worm and the grave know no difference. When we go to that house there is no difference; all acting and all differences end in the grave. And therefore, considering that this world is but an apparition, but the acting of a part, why should we think ourselves the better for anything here? Doth he that acts the part of a nobleman upon the stage think himself better than another that acts the part of a poor man? No. He knows he shall go off in a short time, and then he shall be as he was before. Why are we not thus wise in better things? It is not he that acts the greatest part, but

he that acts any part best. He that acts the part of a poor man may do better than he that acts the part of a rich man. It is not the greatness of the part, but the well acting of it. All is but an apparition. If a mean man honour God in his condition, and be faithful in a mean estate, he is a thousand times better than a great man that makes his greatness an instrument of injustice, as if all the world were to serve his turn, and to make men idolise him; such a man is a wretched man, and will be when he is turned off the stage. It is no matter how long he hath lived, or how great a part he hath acted, but how well. We value not men as they are when they are acting, but as they are after. If they were bad before, they are bad after; and they are praised after if they do it well. So it is no matter what a man acts. If he do it well, he is for ever happy; if he do it ill, he is for ever miserable; all here is but a pageant. If you talk of reality, it is in the things of religion. If you talk of true nobility, it is to be the child of God. If you talk of true riches, they are those that we carry to our deathbed; those that we carry to heaven; those that comfort the soul; those that enrich the soul with grace and comfort and peace; that is true riches. If you talk of true beauty, it is to have the image of God stamped upon our souls, to be like Christ, to be new creatures. If we talk of true strength, it is to stand against temptations, to be able to serve God, and to go through the world without polluting our souls, to bear crosses as we should; that is the true reality. The things of this life are all but apparitions and pageants. The greatest man in the world will say so when he lies a-dying, as that great emperor said, 'I have run through all things, and now nothing doth me good.'* The reality was gone that he thought of, and now there was nothing but a show and apparition; when the reality was gone, nothing doth me good. Come to a man that is gasping out his life, and ask him, What doth honours do you good? What doth riches do you good? What doth possessions do you good? Solomon, a wise man, wise by the Spirit of God; wise by experience, because he was a king; wise by a special gift of God, a gift of wisdom; he had all to enable him to give a true sentence; he that had run through the variety of all good things, what doth he pronounce, but 'vanity of vanities?' He cannot express himself. 'Vanity of vanities,' saith wise, holy, experienced Solomon.

He that had all abilities, that no man was able to say it so well as he, yet he saith, 'Vanity of vanities;' and that which is worse, 'vexation of spirit,' if a man have not especial grace to manage them aright. And therefore I beseech you, 'brethren,' do but represent the things of this life, even under the notion here; they are but apparitions, they are but pageants. If we go to buy anything in this world, we first pull off the trappings; we pull off the mask, or else we may be cozened in the thing. So if we would judge of the things of this world as they are: what is within riches? Is there not a great deal of care? What is within government? What is within the things of this life? There is a goodly show and apparition. What is within? Pull off the mask, and then you shall see the things of this world. The more you pierce into them, and the more you know them, the worse you like them. There is emptiness, and not only so, but vexation. But in the things of heaven, the nearer you are the more you will love them, the more you will admire them. The more a man knows God, the more he may know him. The more a man knows Christ, and loves Christ, the more he may. There is a height, and breadth, and depth there, all dimensions in the love of God in Christ, and in the joys of heaven; they are beyond comprehension. The things that we have in Christ, they are larger than the soul; we cannot comprehend them. There is nothing here but we may compass it; it is inferior to our knowledge and affections. Our affections and our knowledge are larger than anything here; the things of a better life are beyond all. Shall we be taken with apparitions, that the more we know them the more we shall undervalue them?

'And the fashion of this world passeth away.'

It is a fashion, it is but a fashion; and then it 'passeth away.' Indeed, they do pass away; experience sheweth that they pass even like a river. The water passeth away; it goes, and goes along, but it never comes. So the things of this world; they pass away, but they never come again. They vanish away, and we pass away with them too. Even as men in a ship, whether they eat, or drink, or sleep, or walk, the ship goeth, and they go in it. So it is in this world, whether we

eat, or drink, or sleep, we pass away to death. Every day takes a part of our life away; and every day we live, we live a day less. It is gone and past, and never returns again, as water when it is gone; and whether we walk or do anything, the time passeth. While you hear, and while I speak, the time passeth, and never returns again. So 'the fashion of this world passeth away.' All things are passing here.

We say they are moveables, and indeed those things that we call immoveables are moveables. All pass away; heaven and earth will pass away ere long, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth, Rev. 21:1. Kingdoms pass away, and kings pass away, and states pass away. What is become of Rome? What is become of Jerusalem? What is become of Babylon, and all those goodly cities? All are 'passed away;' they are all gone. This experience speaks as well as divinity.

Reason 1. Now, the ground of all this is, not only the nature of things—all things that are [are] made of nothing. Being therefore subject to fall to their first principles again, that is the fundamental reason why things may be moveable 'and pass away.' But that they are so, it is not a sufficient reason, for God might have suspended the mutability of things if he would; as, the heavenly angels are mutable, because they are created, but God hath suspended their mutability world without end; and therefore it is not sufficient that all things are of nothing. It shews that of themselves they may turn to nothing indeed.

Reason 2. But there is another reason; since the fall of man there is a curse upon all things. There is a sentence of mutability and change, and a sentence of 'passing' is passed upon all. All things that have a beginning shall have an end, and that this world shall be a stage of changes and alteration. There is a sentence of vanity upon the creature: 'The creature is subject to vanity; not of his own will, but because God hath subdued it to vanity,' Rom. 8:20. Man committed treason, and therefore the creatures, which are man's servants, all mourn for their master's fall; they all mourn in black, as it were. All the creatures are subject to vanity, all the creatures under the sun are

subject to mutability and change; but we may thank ourselves, we are the grand traitors that brought this misery upon the creature. That is the true reason why all things 'pass away,' and so why ourselves have the sentence of death upon us. 'We pass away,' and the things 'pass away;' and we in the use of them. Thus you see the ground of this, why things pass away in the sentence of mutability and vanity that God hath passed upon them.

Use 2. If this be so, beloved, let us learn not to pass* much for things that will 'pass away.' Not to pass for them, learn all the former directions: 'The fashion of this world passeth away.' Shall we grieve much for the loss of that that we cannot hold? If a glass be broke, is a man much angry? We say it is but brittle metal, and nothing lasteth always. If a friend be dead, shall a man be therefore angry? 'The fashion of this world passeth away.' A sentence is passed upon them. Shall I be moved at that that God hath set down a law for, that one generation shall go and another shall follow after, and there is a succession as in the streams of water? Shall I oppose God's sentence? God hath made all things frail, and it is but the common condition of all since the fall.

Use 3. So it should be a use of comfort and contentment with anything in this world. Place, or riches, or honour, I must leave them, I know not how soon; and this will breed a disposition of contentment. It is enough for him that must leave all, I know not how soon; have I little or much, I must leave all. Here is enough for him that must leave all. And therefore leave worldly things to worldly men; leave all these vain things to vain men. Shall I build a fixed hope on vain things? Oh, no! that should not be so.

Use 4. As we must learn contentment, so it should take us off from the hopes of this world, and from promising ourselves that which we have no promise in the world for, nor experience. Who promised thee thou shouldst enjoy thy wife long? that thou shouldst enjoy thy children long? thy place long? Hast thou a promise for this? The nature of things fight against thee. The things of the world are

variable. Have we not experience of former times? And have we not scriptures to shew that all is 'vanity'? Why should we promise ourselves that which the word doth not promise us, or that we cannot see experience of in the world? Why would we have a condition severed from all men? The seeing of things in a condition of fading, as it should teach us contentment in the use of all things, so it should teach us moderation and wisdom, that we should not promise ourselves anything in this world.

Use 5. And it should teach us to provide for stable, for certain things in changes and alterations. Look to somewhat that may stand by us when all things are gone. Will all these things leave me, and must I leave them? How is it with me for the world without end? Shall I not therefore look for those comforts, and those graces, and for that condition that will abide when I am gone hence? What desperate folly were it! Let us labour for a sanctified use of the 'passing away' of these things, that we may provide for that which is not subject to alteration and change. The favour of God in Christ is for everlasting. The graces of God's Spirit are for everlasting. The condition of God's children is for everlasting. And therefore why should we look after perishing things, and neglect better? For a Christian hath the reality of things: he hath a husband for ever, he hath matter of joy for ever, he hath a possession for ever; and then there will be a new world. All these things are but shows. The Christian hath the reality of all, that never 'passes away.' And therefore, considering that all things else 'pass away but the things that belong to a Christian as a Christian, let Christians learn to make most of their best calling, and value themselves as they are Christians, and value others as they are Christians, not as they are rich, or as they are poor, as they are noble, or as they are great: 'The fashion of this world passeth away.' Value them by that they have of eternity. What of the Spirit is in them? What of the image of God is in them? What grace is in them? Are they new born? Are they truly noble? Are they new creatures? Value them by that, and labour to get that stamped upon our children, and upon our friends. Labour to have communion so with those that we love, that we may have eternal communion in heaven with them.

Labour so to enjoy our friends that our friendship may continue in heaven, considering that 'the fashion of this world passeth away.' All friendship, all bonds, all possessions, and all that we doat of and are desperately mad on, all passeth away: 'The fashion of this world passeth away.'

It is a strange thing, beloved, that a man capable of high thoughts, of excellent thoughts, should spend the marrow of his soul, and the strength of his spirits, about these things; that he should tire his spirits, that he should crack his conscience, that he should wear out his life, about things which he cannot tell how long he shall enjoy them, and neglect these things that abide for ever. For a man this is ill; but for 'brethren,' as he saith, for 'brethren' to do so, that have an inheritance immortal; for them to be cast off the hooks for every cross, for every loss, that are the children of God and heirs of heaven; what a shame is this, that Christians are so much in joy, and so much in sorrow, for these things! It comes from these grounds:

[1.] First, They do not consider and look upon things as passed. They look not with the eye of faith upon things; these things will pass. But they look upon things in passing, and they see no alteration for the present. They should consider; ay, but what sentence is upon them? These are as good as passed; they will be gone ere long. Look upon them therefore as things passed. We are dead; our friends are dead; and the world is gone. Faith saith this. We consider not this 'ay,' and so we are carried away with them. We look upon things passing, and there we see little alteration. A man that looks upon the shadow passing, he cannot see it; but if he come two or three hours after, he shall see it past. Let us look upon things as gone. Though they be not for the present gone, see them in the eye of faith, and that will make us consider them as 'passing away.'

[2.] Again, we are deceived hence in the passing of the things of this life, that we compare them not with eternity. We think it a great matter to enjoy things twenty or forty years. What is this point of time to eternity? Compare this short time here, of health and

strength, of honour and place and friends; what is this to eternity? What desperate folly is it to venture the loss of eternity for the enjoying of these things! Compare these things with world without end, Eph. 3:21, and that will keep us from being deceived with these passing things. We are deceived, because we lay them not in the balance with things that are for ever.

[3.] And then the third ground is, we are forgetful, we are not mindful of our best condition, we make not that use of our knowledge that we might.

When a Christian is all in passion, all in joy, all in fears, or in grief; why, what is the matter at that time? What thoughts hath he of his eternal estate? of the fading condition of these things? He is forgetful and mindless. And therefore let us labour oft to keep our souls in a heavenly frame. And to draw to a conclusion, let us learn to value ourselves. If we be Christians, as we all profess ourselves to be, value ourselves. It is a poorness of spirit for a Christian to over-joy, or to over-grieve for anything that is worse than himself. Are not all things so, that are here, if we be Christians indeed? If we be not Christians, the very toads and serpents are better than blaspheming and filthy creatures, that are opposers of God's ordinances; they are better than such wretches, as many among us. The devil is almost as good as they; such are next the devil. The earth they tread on is better than they. But if a man have grace in him, all the world is inferior to him. What weakness of spirit is it therefore, and emptiness, to be put off with over-much cause of grief and sorrow for anything below that is meaner than ourselves, for anything that is fading, when we have a condition that is not subject to fade? And therefore oft think of our dignity in Christ; think of the motive here; 'brethren,' think of that as well as of the fading condition here. If we would wean ourselves from these things, oft think of the eternal estate of a Christian, that our thoughts may run upon that much; and then upon the frail condition of all things below, that we may be taken off from them, for two things mortify* a man.

The taking off of his affections from that they are set on, and to set them upon that that will fill them and satisfy them to the full; if a man do that, he doth that that a mortified man should do, who is in this world, passing to a better.

Conclusion

To conclude all with this.

All things here in this world are subordinate to a further end. And let us consider therefore that we use them as that we lose not the main.

All the contentments of a traveller are subordinate in the way to his journey's end. If things come amiss in his inn, will he quarrel with his host that he hath not a soft bed? He will think, I am going, I shall have better at home; and these lead me homeward. So all things below are subordinate helps to better. Shall we make them the main? Shall we make all things subordinate to them as worldlings do? subordinate religion to worldly things, and make all things contrary? They do not 'grieve as if they grieved not;' but they hear as if they heard not. They receive the sacrament as if they received it not. They pray as if they prayed not. They speak of holy things, and do them, as if they did them not. But for other things they are drowned in them. This is the policy of Satan, that labours to bring religion to be subordinate. So that if men can be religious and have the favour of such a one, if he can be religious and be great in the world, he will; but if religion itself, and the standing for it, hinder their aims, away with it; they will rather be hollow than stand for a good cause, because they have not learned to subordinate things to the main end. And the reason is, because they have not grace and heavenly wisdom to teach them in what place things should be valued; what is the main, and what attends upon the main; and therefore they take by-things for the main, and the main for the by. Indeed no man is wise but a sound Christian, and he is wise for his soul, and he is wise for

eternity. But what is this for the sacrament? To cut off other things, it is this.*

Are these things perishing food, such as we must leave—vain and empty things? Will not this therefore make us seek the main—the food that endures to everlasting life; and labour to be in Christ more and more, labour to cherish communion with Christ, that everlasting bond? What is the sacrament but the food of our souls, our everlasting manna, that will continue for ever, and make us continue for ever? Christ, if we have him, he continues for ever, and he makes us continue for ever too. And therefore considering that all things else are vain, I beseech you let the consideration of that that hath been spoken be as 'sour herbs' to make the passover, to make Christ relish the better. Oh! Are all things vain, and shall I not labour to have my part in that that shall never die, in him that is my husband for ever, and my Lord for ever? Shall I not labour to strengthen mine interest in him that hath all good things in him? What if all the earth should fail? If I have communion with Christ, I have all. If I marry Christ, I have all with him. All is my jointure, if I have Christ once: 'All things are yours, if you are Christ's,' 1 Cor. 3:21–23. If I have Christ, what can I want? Let this strengthen my desire to come to the sacrament. Christ is the food of the soul; all other food the sweetness of it is gone within a quarter of an hour. The sweetness is gone presently, and the strength within a day or two, of all other food that we take. But this food, Christ, the food of the soul, Christ offering himself unto death, and shedding out his blood, and giving his body to be crucified for us, this food feeds our souls to everlasting life. We cherish our faith in the assurance of the favour of God to everlasting; the sweetness, the strength, and the comfort of this food endures for ever. And therefore, considering that all other things are food that perisheth, labour for that that will feed us to everlasting life. And then we shall make a right use of the alteration and change of all things.

A heathen man can say this text, set 'brethren' aside; a heathen man could tell you, *Transit gloria mundi* (d), and 'The fashion of things

pass away.' He sees them, and thereupon could infer the negative part. Therefore we should not be worldly. By the light of nature, a man that hath no religion may be sound in that, and therefore not to care much for earthly things, considering that we must be gone.

A heathen man could speak very sweetly this way, as Plutarch, and Seneca, and the rest. What fine speeches had they this way. Oh, but the positive part, that is, when we see all things here are vain and fading, to know what we must cleave to, that is proper to religion, to know Christ, and the good we have by Christ. When we have him we have all. He is the food of our souls. These things are proper to religion. And therefore let us arise from the consideration of the vanity of all things to the positive part, to interest ourselves in that that is better than all things. Which if we have, we have all; and then we shall make a right use of this.

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