

fellow-servant. Or else they fall into some sin. While they slept, their lamps went out : Matt. xxv. 5, 8. Or some evil befalls them ; (Lam. i. 9 ;) “ Sudden destruction,” &c. (1 Thess. v. 3.) When men grow secure as to their state, and of a supine, sleepy, careless spirit, such are ever in a most unsafe, sinful condition, nigh to cursing, and on the very brink of ruin and utter destruction.

SERMON XXIII.

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HOW MUST WE MAKE RELIGION OUR BUSINESS ?

Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ?—Luke ii. 49.

THESE are the words of our Lord Jesus, whose lips dropped as an honey-comb. The occasion was this : Christ having the Spirit of wisdom and sanctity poured on him without measure, being but twelve years old, goes to the temple, and fell a-disputing with the doctors. (Verse 46.) Where should learning blossom but upon that tree which did bear several sorts of fruit ? Who could better interpret secrets than He who lay in his Father's bosom ? (Col. ii. 9.) “ All that heard him were astonished at his understanding.” (Luke ii. 47.) In the Greek it is ἐξίσταντο, “ they were out of themselves ” with admiration.* Well might they admire, that he who never had been at the university should be able to silence the great rabbies : “ How knoweth this man letters, having never learned ? ” (John vii. 15.) While they were wondering, his mother, who now was come to seek him, propounds this question, “ Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us ? ” (Luke ii. 48 ;) that is, “ Why hast thou put us to all this labour in seeking thee ? ” † In the words of the text Christ makes a rational and religious reply : “ Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ? ” In the Greek it is, ἐν τοῖς τοῦ Πατρὸς μου, “ in the things of my Father.” As if Christ had said, “ I must be doing the work which my Father in heaven hath set me about : for this received I my mission and unction, that I might do the will of Him that sent me.” (John ix. 4.) What am I in the world for, but to promote his glory, propagate his truth, and be as a load-star to draw souls to heaven ? “ Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ? ”

DOCTRINE.

From this example of our blessed Saviour, in making his Father's work his business, we learn this great truth :—

* *Usque ad stuporem percussit.*—BRUGENS. “ They were completely surprised, and overcome with stupor.”—EDIT. † *Minimè objurans, sed rem fidenter et modestè quærens.*—BRUGENSIS. “ His mother did not utter this in a chiding tone, but inquired into the matter with modesty, and in confidence ” that she would receive a satisfactory reply.—EDIT.

That it is the duty of every Christian to make religion his business.

Religion is not a *παρεργον*,* or “thing by the by,” proper only for spare hours; but it must be the grand business of our lives. St. Paul made it so: his great care was to know Christ, and to be found in Christ. (Phil. iii. 9, 10.) How abundantly did he lay out himself for God! *Περισσοτερον εκοπιασα*: “I laboured more abundantly than they all,” &c. (1 Cor. xv. 10.) St. Paul moved heavenward, not slowly as the sun on the dial, but as the sun in its hemisphere, with a winged swiftness. He made religion his business.

For the illustrating and unfolding of this, there are three questions to be resolved:—

- I. What is meant by religion?
- II. Why we must make religion our business?
- III. What it is to make religion our business?

QUESTION I. *What is meant by religion?*

I answer, the Latin word *religio quasi religatio*,—it signifies “a knitting together.” Sin hath loosened us from God; but when religion comes into the heart, it doth *religare*, “fasten the heart to God again;” as the members are knit to the head by several nerves and ligaments.† Religion is the spiritual sinew and ligament that knits us to God. The Greek word for religion *ευσεβεια*,‡ signifies “a right worshipping.” This is religion, when we not only worship the true God, but in that manner which he hath prescribed; by a right rule, from a right principle, to a right end.

QUESTION II. The second question is, *Why we must make religion our business?*

I answer, because religion is a matter of the highest nature; while we are serving God, we are doing angels’ work. The business of religion doth infinitely out-balance all things besides. Pleasure, profit, honour, (the trinity which the world adores,) are all of an inferior alloy, and must give way to religion. The fear of God is said to be “the whole duty of man;” (Eccles. xii. 13;) or, as it is in the Hebrew, *ל-ך ה-ך ה-ך ה-ך* “the whole of man.” Other things may delight, religion doth satiate; other things may make us wise to admiration, religion makes us “wise to salvation.” (2 Tim. iii. 15.)

QUESTION III. The third question is, *What it is to make religion our business?*

I answer: it consists principally in these seven things:—

1. *We make religion our business, when we wholly devote ourselves to religion.*—“Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear;” (Psalm cxix. 38;) as a scholar who devotes himself to his studies makes learning his business. A godly man may sometimes run himself, through precipitancy and incogitancy, upon that which is evil. There is no man so bad but he may do some good actions; and there is no man so good but he may do some bad actions. But the course and tenor of a godly man’s life is religious; when he doth *deviate* to sin, yet he doth *devote* himself to God. It is with a Christian as it is with a company of

* “Something only secondary in importance.”—EDIT. † LACTANTIUS, *Div. Instit.* lib. iv. ‡ *Ab ev, et σεβουμαι.*

mariners at sea: they are bound for such a coast: now, while they are sailing, they may meet with such a cross-wind as may turn them back, and drive them a quite contrary way; but as soon as the storm is over, and the sea calm, they recover themselves again, and get into the right way where they sailed before. So it is with a Christian: heaven is the haven he is bound for, the scripture is the compass he sails by; yet, a contrary wind of temptation blowing, he may be driven back into a sinful action; but he recovers himself again by repentance, and sails on constantly to the heavenly port. (Isai. v. 20.?) This is to make religion our business, when, notwithstanding some excursions through human frailty, we are devoted to God's fear, and dedicate our *το ζῆν* ["entire existence"] to God.

2. *We make religion our business, when we intend * the business of religion chiefly.*—It doth *principatum obtinere* ["gain the pre-eminence"]. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God;" (Matt. vi. 33;) first in *time*, before all things, and first in *affection*, above all things. We must give religion the precedency, making all other things either subservient or subordinate to it. We are to provide for our families, but chiefly for our souls: this is to make religion our business. Jacob put the cattle before, and made his wives and children lag after. (Gen. xxxii. 16.) It is unworthy to make religion come behind in the rear: it must lead the van, and all other things must stoop and vail to it. He never had religion in his heart who saith to any worldly thing, "In the throne thou shalt be greater." †

3. *We make religion our business, when our thoughts are most busied about religion.*—While others are thinking how they shall do to get a living, our thoughts are, how we shall do to be saved. David did muse upon God: "While I was musing the fire burned." (Psalm xxxix. 3.) Thoughts are as passengers in the soul: when we travel every day to the city of God, and are contemplating glory and eternity, this is to make religion our business. Theophylact calls holy contemplation, "the gate and portal by which we enter into heaven;" ‡ a Christian, by divine soliloquies and ejaculations, is in heaven before his time; he is rapt-up into paradise, his thoughts are all packed-up and gone.

4. *We make religion our business, when our main end and scope is to serve God.*—He is said to make the world his business, whose great design is to get the world. St. Paul's ultimate end was, that Christ might be magnified, and the church edified. (Phil. i. 20; 2 Cor. xii. 19.) Our aims must be good, as well as our actions. Many make use of religion for sinister ends; like the eagle, while she flies aloft, her eye is upon her prey. Hypocrites serve God *propter aliud*; § they love the temple for the gold; (Matt. xxiii. 17;) they court the gospel, not for its beauty, but for its jewels: these do not make religion their business, but a politic trick and artifice to get money. || But then we make religion our busi-

* In the classical signification, well-known and much-used by our ancestors, to *pay great regard to, devote much attention to, to pursue any thing with intensesness.*—EDIT. † *Si Christus pro te de celesti sede descendit, tu propter ipsum fuge terrena.*—AUGUSTINUS. "If on thy account Christ descended from his heavenly throne, do thou, for his sake, avoid and flee from earthly entanglements."—EDIT. ‡ *Ἡ δὴρα τῶν οὐρανῶν, δι' αὐτῆς γὰρ προσάγομεθα τῷ Θεῷ.*—THEOPHYLACT. § "On account of other advantages."—EDIT.

|| *Μηδεν πραξῆς, αν μη κερδος εχη, το κατα Θεον.*—CHRYSOSTOMUS. "No good action wilt thou perform, unless thou canst derive some advantage to thyself" through the semblance of piety.—EDIT.

ness, when the glory of God is mainly in our eye, and the very purport and intent of our life is, to live to Him who hath died for us. (2 Cor. v. 15.) God is the centre, and all the lines of our actions must be drawn to this centre.

5. *We make religion our business, when we do trade with God every day.*—“Our conversation is in heaven.” (Phil. iii. 20.) The Greek word for “conversation,” *πολιτευμα*, signifies “commerce and traffic:” “our merchandise is in heaven.” A man may live in one place, and drive his trade in another: a saint, though he lives in the world, yet he trades above the moon; * he is a merchant for the pearl of price. This is to make religion our business: when we keep a holy intercourse with God, there is a trade driven between us and heaven: “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John i. 3.) God comes down to us upon the wing of his Spirit, and we go up to him upon the wing of prayer.

6. *We make religion our business, when we redeem time from secular things for the service of God.*—A good Christian is the greatest monopolizer: he doth hoard up all the time he can for religion: “At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee.” (Psalm cxix. 62.) Those are the best hours which are spent with God; and David, having tasted how sweet the Lord was, would borrow some time from his sleep, that he might take a turn in heaven. It well becomes Christians to take time from worldly occasions, sinful dressings, idle visits, that they may be the more intent upon the matters of religion. I have read of a holy man, who being tempted by his former evil companions to sin, he made this answer: “I am so busy in reading in a little book with three leaves, that I have no leisure so much as to mind my other business;” and being asked afterward, whether he had read over the book, replied: “This book with three leaves is of three several colours, red, white, and black; which contain such deep mysteries, that I have resolved with myself to read therein all the days of my life. In the first leaf, which is *red*, I meditate on the precious blood of Christ, which was shed for my sins; in the *white* leaf, I meditate on the pure and delicious joys of heaven; in the *black* leaf, I contemplate the hideous and dreadful torments of hell, prepared for the wicked to all eternity.” This is to make religion our business, when we are so taken up with it, that we have scarce any leisure for other things. Christian, thou hast a God to serve, and a soul to save; and if thou hast any thing of religion in thee, thou wilt take heed of the thieves of time, and wilt engross all opportunities for the best things. How far are they from Christianity, who juggle out holy duties! instead of borrowing time from the world for prayer, they steal time from prayer, that they may follow the world.

7. *We make religion our business, when we serve God with all our might.*—Our strength and spirits are drawn forth about religion: we seek, sweat, strive, bestir ourselves, as in a matter of life and death, and put forth not only diligence, but violence. “David danced before the Lord with all his might.” (2 Sam. vi. 14.) This is to make religion our

* *Ut municipales calorum nos gerimus.* “We conduct ourselves as the burghesses of heaven.”—EDIT.

business, when we shake off sloth, and put on zeal as a garment. We must not only pray, but pray fervently: (James v. 16 :) we must not only repent, but "be zealous and repent:" (Rev. iii. 19 :) we must not only love, but be "sick of love." (Canticles ii. 5.)

Multa tulit, . . . sudavit, et alsit, &c.*

This is to be a Christian to purpose, when we put forth all our vigour and fervour in religion, and take the kingdom of God as it were by storm. (Matt. xi. 12.) It is not a faint velleity [that] will bring us to heaven: there must not only be wishing, but working; and we must so work, as being damned if we come short.

USES.

USE I. INFORMATION.

BRANCH I. Hence learn, that *there are but few good Christians.*—O how few make religion their business! Is he an artificer that never wrought in the trade? Is he a Christian that never wrought in the trade of godliness? How few make religion their business!

1. *Some make religion a complement,† but not their business.*—They court religion by a profession, and, if need be, religion shall have their letters of commendation; but they do not make religion their business. Many of Christ's disciples, who said, "Lord, evermore give us this bread," yet soon after basely deserted Christ, and would follow him no longer. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." (John vi. 34, 66.)

2. *Others make the world their business.*—"Who mind earthly things." (Phil. iii. 19.) The earth puts out the fire; so the love of earthly things puts out the fire of heavenly affections. It was a judgment upon Korah and Dathan, "the earth swallowed them up." (Num. xvi. 32.) Thus it is with many: the world swallows up their time, thoughts, discourse; they are swallowed up alive in the earth. There is a lawful use of these things; but the sin is in the excess. The bee may suck a little honey from the leaf; but put it in a barrel of honey, and it is drowned. How many engulf themselves in the creature, and drive such a trade in the shop, that they quite break in their trading for heaven! The farm and oxen have kept millions from Christ. These do not make religion their business, but make the world their business; and what will all be at death, but as a dream or fancy? ‡ "The people shall labour in the very fire, and shall weary themselves for very vanity." (Hab. ii. 13.)

BRANCH II. Hence see how hard it is to be saved.—It is not so easy as some apprehend: religion must be our business. It is not enough to have a smack of religion, a touch and away, *canis ad Nilum*; § but we must make it our *το εργον*, "our business." How many precepts have we to obey, how many temptations to resist, how many graces to treasure up! Religion is the work of our whole lives, and all little enough!

* HORATIUS *De Arte Poetica*, 413. For a translation of this passage see page 425.—EDIT.

† A good use of the old word, in the sense of "something to fill up a vacant moment."—EDIT.

‡ Σκια και οναρ, και τουτων ουδαινωτερα. "A shadow, and a dream, and the most worthless and contemptible of these things."—EDIT.

§ "Like the dog which drinks hastily of the waters of the Nile," moving cautiously along the banks of the river while trying to slake his thirst, through fear of becoming the prey of crocodiles.—EDIT.

Lord, then how hard is it to be saved! "Where will the sinner appear?" What will become of the gallants of our times, who make sin their business, whose whole employment is to indulge and pamper the flesh? Φιληδονοι μαλλον η φιλοπονοι.* "All their care is," as Jerome speaks, "to crisp their hair, to sparkle their diamonds; instead of steeping their souls in brinish tears, they bathe themselves in perfumed waters, and ride to hell upon the back of pleasure." †

USE II. TRIAL.

Let us deal impartially with our own souls, and put ourselves upon a strict trial before the Lord, whether we make religion our business. And for our better progress herein, I shall lay down ten signs and characters of a man that makes religion his business, and by these, as by a gospel-touchstone, we may try ourselves:—

CHARACTER I. *He who makes religion his business doth not place his religion only in externals.*—"He is not a Jew who is one outwardly," εν τω φανερω. (Rom. ii. 28.) Religion doth not stand only in forms and shadows; this is to give God *leaves* instead of *fruit*. It is often seen, that the pomp of worship destroys the purity, as the paint of the glass hinders the light; and it is no untruth to say, that formality may as well damn as profaneness. A superstitious Pharisee may as well be in hell as a drunken epicure. A Christian's main work lies with his heart. He that makes religion his business, gives God the vitals: he worships him "in spirit and in truth." (John iv. 24.) In stilling, *the spirits* are strongest. The good Christian distills out the spirits for God. Aaron must offer the fat upon the altar: "He shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord; the fat that covereth the inwards. All the fat is the Lord's." (Lev. iii. 3, 16.) If Aaron had offered the skin instead of the fat, it would not have been accepted. External devotion alone is offering the skin; and they that give God only the skin of duty, shall carry away only the shell of comfort.

CHAR. II. *He who makes religion his business avoids every thing that may be a remora and "hinderance" to him in his work.*—A wicked man cares not whether the matter of religion goes forward or backward; he stands in the way of temptation; and as if sin did not come fast enough, he "draws it as with a cart-rope." (Isai. v. 18.) But he who makes religion his business flies from temptation; and while he is running the heavenly race, "lays aside every weight of sin which doth so easily beset" him. (Heb. xii. 1.) A man may as well miss of heaven by loitering in the way, as by losing the way. "The king's business required haste;" (1 Sam. xxi. 8;) so the business of religion requires haste: therefore the good Christian is careful that he be not taken off the work, and so be taken tardy in it.

CHAR. III. *He who makes religion his business hath a care to preserve conscience inviolable, and had rather offend all the world than offend his conscience.*—"I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience." (2 Tim. i. 3.) Much of religion lies in conscience.

* "Lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of labour."—EDIT. † *Quilus cura est ut vestes bene oleant, ut digiti annulis radient, ut crines calamistro rotentur.*—HIERONYMUS.

Faith is a precious jewel ; but conscience is the cabinet where this jewel must be kept : " Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." (1 Tim. iii. 9.) Love is a beautiful flower ; but this flower most grows in the garden of a pure conscience : " Charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience." (1 Tim. i. 5.) So sacred a thing is conscience, that without this all religion drops in pieces. He who makes religion his business, labours to get conscience regulated by scripture ; (as the watch is set by the dial ;) and, having done this, he keeps his conscience as his eye, that no dust of sin fall into it.*

CHAR. IV. *He who makes religion his business, religion hath an influence upon all his civil actions.*

1. *Religion hath an influence upon his eating and drinking.*—He holds the golden bridle of temperance ; he eats sparingly. " The godly man feeds not to please the sensual appetite, but that he may," as Chrysostom saith, " by the strength he receives from the creature," *μαλλον εν τη πνευματικων εργασια σπουδην επιδεικνυσθαι*, " be the more fit for the cheerful discharge of spiritual services : " he makes not his food fuel for lust, but help to duty. Epicures dig their own grave with their teeth ; they feed without fear. *Irregulares gulares*.† Sinners fear not lest their table should be a snare ; ‡ (Jude 12 ;) they fear not the process of justice : while the wine is in the cup, they fear not the hand-writing on the wall. But the godly man, being regulated by religion, puts a knife to his throat, that he may cut the throat of intemperance. (Prov. xxiii. 2.)

2. He that makes religion his business, *religion hath an influence upon his recreation.*—The strings of the viol must sometimes be slackened, lest they break ;

*Neque semper arcum
Tendit Apollo ; §*

God affords his people generous delights ; the scripture allows the use of the bow. (2 Sam. i. 18.) But we are apt to offend most in lawful things ; more are killed with wine than with poison. Religion sits [as] moderator in the soul. The man influenced by religion dares not make play an occupation ; it is oil to quicken him in God's service, not a sea to engulf him. He who is devoted to religion puts bounds to the Olympian sports ; he knows where to make his stops and periods ; he sets up an *Herculis columna*, || on which he writes, *Non ultra*, " No further than this."

* *O felix conscientie Paradisus, bonorum operum virgultis consita, variisque virtutum floribus purpurata.*—AUGUSTINUS *ad Fratres in Eremo*, tom. x. " O the blessed Paradise of a pure conscience, planted around with pleasant shrubs of good works, and beautifully empurpled with variegated flowers of virtues and graces !" —EDIT. † " Lawless gluttons," who exercise no rule of moderation while in the act of gratifying their appetites. It is a witty play upon the two words, *irregulares gulares*, which cannot be tersely rendered into our language.—EDIT. ‡ *Ουκ ογατε απο της αμετρον αδηφαγιας τα μυρια επαγομενα νοσηματα.*—CHRYSOSTOMUS *in Psalmum lxi. 22*. " You have no conception of the myriads of maladies which are introduced by the indulgence of excess and intemperance." —EDIT. § HORATI *Carmin.* lib. ii. od. x. 19.

" Sometimes Apollo tunes his lyre,
And wakes the Muse to sing ;
Nor deals perpetual death around
With his unerring string."—DUNCOMBE'S Translation.

|| " A pillar or boundary as immovable as one of those which bear the name of Hercules ; " Calpe or Gibraltar in Europe, and Abyla in Africa.—EDIT.

3. He that makes religion his business, *religion hath an influence upon his buying and selling.*—The wicked get a livelihood often by cozening; sometimes they embase commodities: they “sell the refuse of the wheat.” (Amos viii. 6.) They would pick out the best grains of corn, and then sell the rest. Sometimes they falsify their weights: “He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand.” (Hosea xii. 7.) But he who makes religion his business is regulated by it in the shop: he is just in his dealings; he dares not hold the book of God in one hand, and false weights in the other; he is faithful to his neighbour, and makes as much reckoning of the Ten Commandments, as of his Creed.

4. *Religion hath an influence upon his marrying.*—He labours to graft upon a religious stock: he is not so ambitious of parentage as [of] piety; nor is his care so much to espouse dowry as virtue: * in a word, he seeks for “a meet help,” one that may help him up the hill to heaven: this is marrying “in the Lord.” That marriage indeed is “honourable,” (Heb. xiii. 4,) when the husband is joined to one who is the “temple of the Holy Ghost.” (1 Cor. vi. 19.) Here is the man that makes religion his business, who in all his civil transactions is steered and influenced by religion: religion is the universal ingredient.

CHAR. V. *He who makes religion his business, is good in his calling and relation.*—Relative grace doth much grace religion. I shall suspect his goodness who herein is eccentric. Some will pray and discourse well; but it appears they never made religion their business, but took it up rather for ostentation than as an occupation, because they are defective in relative duties: they are bad husbands, bad children, &c. If one should draw a picture, and leave out the eye, it would much eclipse and take from the beauty of the picture: to fail in a relation stains the honour of profession. He who makes religion his business is like a star shining in the proper orb and station wherein God hath set him.

CHAR. VI. *He who makes religion his business hath a care of his company.*—He dares not twist into a cord of friendship with sinners: “I have not sat with vain persons.” (Psalm xxvi. 4.) Diamonds will not cement with rubbish. It is dangerous to intermingle with the wicked, lest their breath prove infectious: sin is very catching. They “were mingled among the Heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.” (Psalm cvi. 35, 36.) *Αναγκη η παθειν, η μαθειν, τι κακον.* † If you mingle bright and rusty armour together, the rusty will not be made bright, but the bright will be made rusty. He who makes religion his business, likes not to be near them whose nearness sets him further off from God, and whose embraces, like those of the spider, are to suck out the precious life. The godly man ingrafts ‡ into the “communion of saints,” and hereby, as the scions, he partakes of the sap and virtue of their grace: he who makes it

* *Καν γυναικα αγομεθα, μη χρηματων περιουσιαν, μηδε προγονων περιφανειαν* αλλα τροπον αρετης λαμβανωμεν και επικεικταιν.—CHRYSOSTOMUS. “Though each of us marries a wife, let us not receive (as our spouse) a superabundance of property, nor the splendour of ancestry, but rather a virtuous disposition and habits of discretion.”—EDIT. † EPICETUS. “They must have either endured, or learned, something that was evil.”—EDIT. ‡ This word is here employed as a reciprocal or reflexive verb, like the middle voice in Greek, and conveys the signification of *he ingrafts himself, or is ingrafted.*—EDIT.

his business to get to heaven, associates only with those who may make him better, or whom he may make better.

CHAR. VII. *He who makes religion his business keeps his spiritual watch always by him.**

1. He watcheth his *eye*: "I made a covenant with mine eyes." (Job xxxi. 1.) When Dinah was gadding, she was defiled. (Gen. xxxiv. 1, 2.) When the eye is gadding by impure glances, the heart is defiled.

2. He who makes religion his business watcheth his *thoughts*, lest they should turn to froth: "How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" (Jer. iv. 14.) What a world of sin is minted in the fancy! A child of God sets a spy over his thoughts, he summons them in, and captivates them "to the obedience of Christ." (2 Cor. x. 5.)

3. He who makes religion his business watcheth his *passions*.—Passion is like gunpowder, which the devil setting on fire blows up the soul. Jonah in a passion quarrels with the Almighty. (Jonah iv. 1, 9.) He who is devoted to religion watcheth his passions, lest, the tide growing high, reason should be carried down the stream, and be drowned in it.

4. He who makes religion his business watcheth his *duties*.—"Watch and pray." (Matt. xxvi. 41.) First. He doth watch *in* prayer. The heart is subject to remissness; if it be not dead in sin, it will be dead in prayer; a Christian watcheth, lest he should abate his fervour in duty; he knows if the strings of his spiritual viol slacken, he cannot "make melody in his heart to the Lord." (Eph. v. 19; Col. iii. 16.) Secondly. He doth watch *after* prayer. As a man is most careful of himself when he comes out of a hot bath, the pores being then most open and subject to cold; so a Christian is most careful when he comes from an ordinance, lest his heart should decoy him into sin: therefore, when he hath prayed, he sets a watch. He deals with his heart as the Jews dealt with Christ's sepulchre; they "made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch." (Matt. xxvii. 66.) A good Christian having been at the word, and sacrament, (that sealing ordinance,) after the sealing he sets a watch.

5. He who makes religion his business watcheth his *temptations*.—Temptation is the scout [which] the devil sends out to discover our forces; it is the train he lays to blow up our grace. Satan ever lies at the catch; he hath his *βαθη*, "depths," (Rev. ii. 24,) his *μεθοδους*, "methods," (Eph. iv. 14,) his *νοηματα*, "devices." (2 Cor. ii. 11.) He is continually fishing for our souls; and if Satan be angling, we had need be watching. He who makes religion his business is full of holy excubation: he lies sentinel, and, with the prophet, stands upon his watchtower. (Hab. ii. 1.) Solomon saith of a virtuous woman, "Her candle goeth not out by night." (Prov. xxxi. 18.) The good Christian keeps his watch-candle always burning.

CHAR. VIII. *He who makes religion his business, every day casts up his accounts to see how things go in his soul.* (Lam. iii. 40.)†—Solomon saith, "Know the state of thy flocks." (Prov. xxvii. 23.) A man that makes religion his work is careful to know the state of his soul: before the Lord brings him to a trial, he brings himself to a trial: he had rather

* *Ὅσως ἕμιν ἀγρυπνείας χρεία.* "How needful is it for each of us to exercise watchfulness!"—EDIT.

† *SENECA.*

use the looking-glass of the word to see his own heart, than put on the broad spectacles of censure to see another's fault. He plays the critic upon himself, he searcheth what sin is in his heart unrepented of; and, having found it out, he labours by his tears, as by "the waters of jealousy," to make the thigh of sin to rot. (Num. v. 22.) He searcheth whether he have grace or no, and he tries whether it be genuine or spurious. He is as much afraid of painted holiness, as he is of going to a painted heaven. He traverseth things in his soul, and will never leave, till that question, "whether he be in the faith," be put out of question. (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) Here is the man making religion his business: he is loath to be a spiritual bankrupt; therefore is still calling himself to account; and wherein he comes short, he gets Christ to be his Surety.

CHAR. IX. *He who makes religion his business will be religious, whatever it cost him.*—He is a resolved man: "I have sworn, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." (Psalm cxix. 106.) There are some who *will be rich*; (1 Tim. vi. 9;) and there are some who *will be godly*. (2 Tim. iii. 12.) He that makes religion his business will not, as Luther saith, be put off with other things: he can want health, riches, friends; but he cannot want Christ or grace. He will be godly: let the times be what they will, they shall not take him off the work of religion; he will follow Christ upon the water; the floods of persecution cannot drown his zeal; he doth not say, "There is a lion in the way;" he will wrestle with difficulties, march in the face of death. The Christians of the primitive church cried out to the persecutor, "Hew us in pieces, burn us: we will never worship your idols:"* these were in good earnest for heaven. There is a great deal of difference between them who go to sea for pleasure, and those mariners who are to go a voyage to the East Indies: the first, upon the least storm, retreat back to shore; but they who are embarked for a voyage hold on their course, though the sea be rough and stormy, and will venture their lives in hope of the golden harvest at the Indies. Hypocrites seem religious when things are serene and calm; but they will not sail in a storm: those only who make religion their business will hold out their voyage to heaven in the midst of tempests and death-threatening dangers.

CHAR. X. *He that makes religion his business lives every day as his last day.*—He prays in the morning as if he were to die at night; he lives as if he were presently to be called to God's bar; he walks "soberly, righteously, and godly;" (Titus ii. 12;) he girds his loins, trims his lamp, sets his house in order, that when death comes for him with an *habeas corpus*, he may have nothing to do but to die. Behold here the man who makes religion his business.

USE III. EXHORTATION.

Let me persuade all you whose consciences may smite you for former neglects, *now* set upon the work, make religion your business; contend *tantumquam pro aris et focis*, bestir yourselves in this as in a matter of life and death.

QUESTION. "But how must we do to make religion our business?"

ANSWER. That you may be serious in this work, I shall lay down several rules for your help and direction herein.

* *Ure, tunde, divelle: idola tua non adorabimus.*—TERTULLIANUS.

RULES FOR MAKING RELIGION OUR BUSINESS.

RULE I. If you would make religion your business, *possess yourselves with this maxim, that religion is the end of your creation.*—God never sent men into the world only to eat and drink, and put on fine clothes; but the end of their creation is to honour him: “That God in all things may be glorified.” (1 Peter iv. 11.) Should the body only be tended and looked after, this were to trim the scabbard instead of the blade: it were to invert and frustrate the very end of our being.

RULE II. If you would make religion your business, *get a change of heart wrought.*—Breathe after a principle of holiness. He cannot make religion his business who hath no religion.* Can the body move without a principle of life? Christian, get thy heart spiritualized by grace: an earthly heart will no more trade in heaven than a mill-stone will ascend, or a serpent fly in the air; the heart must be divinely touched with the Spirit, as the needle with the loadstone, ere it can cleave to God, and follow him fully. (Num. xiv. 24.) Never expect the practice to be holy, till first there be a holy principle.

RULE III. If you would make religion your business, *set yourselves always under the eye of God.*—The master’s eye makes the servant work; God’s eye will quicken our devotion. “I have set the Lord always before me.” (Psalm xvi. 8.) If we leave off work, or loiter in our work, God sees: † He hath a casement [which] opens into our breasts; this οφθαλμος ακοιμητος, as Chrysostom calls it, “this eye of God that never sleeps,” would make us active in the sphere of duty. If, indeed, God’s eye were at any time off us, we might slacken our pace in religion: but He is ever looking on; if we “take the wings of the morning,” we cannot fly from his presence: (Psalm cxxxix. 9:) and He who is now the Spectator will be the Judge. O how would this consideration of God’s omniscience keep us from being truants in religion, how would it infuse a spirit of activity and gallantry into us, making us put forward with all our might in the race to heaven!

RULE IV. If you would make religion your business, *think often of the shortness of time.* ‡—This life is but “a vapour,” (James iv. 14,) a “shadow:” (1 Chron. xxix. 15:) it is ἡδὴ “as nothing:” (Psalm xxxix. 5:) ὁ βίος τροχός. § We are wheeling apace out of the world, and there is no work to be done for our souls in the grave: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, in the grave, whither thou goest.” (Eccles. ix. 10.) Now is the time of life, now is the day of grace: you know not how soon these two suns may set. The shorter our life, the swifter should be our pace.

RULE V. If you would make religion your business, *get an understanding heart.*—Weigh things seriously in the balance of reason and judgment. Think of the infinite importance of this business; our eternal misery or happiness depends upon it. Other things are but for

* Δει τι ερδον εωαι. “There must be some inward principle.”—EDIT. † *Interest animis nostris, et cogitationibus mediis intervenit.*—SENECA. “God is present with our spirits, and is no stranger to our most secret cogitations.”—EDIT. ‡ *Cito pede praterit (labitur) ætas.*—OVIDII *Art. Amat.* lib. iii. 65. “With what a swift foot does life glide away!”—EDIT. § PHOENICIDES, 25. “Life is a wheel in motion.”—EDIT.

convenience, this is *of necessity*. If this work be not done, we are undone; if we do not the work which believers are doing, we must do the work which devils are doing; and if God give us a serious heart to lay out ourselves in the business of religion, our *income* will be greater than our *expense*. Religion is a good trade, if it be well followed; it will quit the cost; it is working in silver: "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter i. 9.) God will shortly take us from the working-house to the throne, and will set upon our head a fresh garland made of the flowers of Paradise.*

RULE VI. If you would make religion your business, *implore the help of God's Spirit*.—All we can do is but lost labour, unless the Spirit excite and accelerate. Beg a gale from heaven. "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden," &c. (Canticles iv. 16.) If the Spirit join with our chariot, then we move to heaven swiftly, as "a roe upon the mountains," or as "the chariots of Ammi-nadib." (Canticles ii. 17; vi. 12.)

Now, having laid down the rules, let me, for a conclusion, press all Christians to this great duty of making religion their business; and I will use but two weighty considerations:—

MOTIVES.

MOTIVE I. *The sweetness that is in religion*.—All her paths are pleasantness. (Prov. iii. 17.) The way of religion is strewed with roses, in regard of that inward peace [which] God gives: "In keeping thy precepts there is great reward." (Psalm xix. 11.) This is such a labour as hath delight in it. As while the mother tends her child, and sometimes beyond her strength too, yet finds a secret delight in it; so while a Christian is serving God, there is that inward contentment and delight infused, and he meets with such transfigurations of soul, that he thinks himself half in heaven. It was Christ's "meat and drink" to do his Father's will. (John iv. 34.) Religion was St. Paul's recreation. (Rom. vii. 22.) Though I should not speak of *wages*, the *vales* [which] God gives us in this life are enough to make us in love with his service.

MOTIVE II. The second and last consideration is, *that millions of persons have miscarried to eternity, for want of making religion their business*.—They have done something in religion, but not to purpose: they have begun, but have made too many stops and pauses. They have been lukewarm and neutral in the business; they have served God as if they served him not; they have sinned fervently, but prayed faintly. Religion hath been a thing only by the by; they have served God by fits and starts, but have not made religion their business; therefore have miscarried to all eternity. If you could see a wicked man's tombstone in hell, you might read this inscription upon it: "Here lies one in hellish flames, for not making religion his business." How many ships have suffered shipwreck, notwithstanding all their glorious names of **THE HOPE**, **THE SAFE-GUARD**, **THE TRIUMPH**! So, how many souls, notwithstanding their glorious title of saintship, have suffered shipwreck in hell for ever, because they have not made religion their business!

* Μη φυγῆς τὸν καματον, ἵνα τυχῆς τὸν στεφανον.—CHRYSOSTOMUS. "Decline no labour, relax in no exertion, in prospect of thy obtaining the crown immortal."—EDIT.