

A Discourse Concerning Old-age Tending to the Instruction, Caution and Comfort of Aged People

Richard Steele, 1688

"Teach the *older men* to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the *older women* to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good." [Titus 2:2-3](#)

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The epistle to the readers

Friendly readers,

You have here a plain discourse concerning old-age. The design of it is to instruct, to warn, and to comfort the weaker sort of aged people, among whom I must place myself. The wiser and stronger may find divers things upon this subject collected here together, which they know and practice better than I. But that which put me upon this attempt, was,

1. Some years experience of old-age in myself.
2. More leisure time, by reason of my bodily infirmities, and other restraints than I could have desired.
3. An observation, that there was no full treatise in our tongue upon this point.

4. And lastly, an sincere desire to be some way useful in the world. These were the true occasions of this treatise. Whatever in it tastes of the cask — impute that to my weakness; whatever is worthy — ascribe it only to God's goodness. I know it is full of imperfections, but when the *principle, matter, and end* of an action are honest, candid people will interpret the rest in the best sense. Such ancient and modern authors, I could meet with, as have written upon this subject, I have perused, and digested their observations in their places. But the Scriptures here produced are my great vouchers, and which I do most earnestly recommend to the readers, for they are worthy the highest regard. That the Lord would enable me and you to frame our old-age according to these instructions, is the earnest prayer

Your servant for Jesus sake,
Richard Steele, May 10, 1688

Intending a discourse concerning old-age, I shall use that method, which I conceive will be most comprehensive, and most commodious for my purpose; which is,

1. By making some *description* old age.
2. By showing the true *causes* of it, and the best *preservatives* against it.
3. The *sins* or *vices* which are most usual in it.

4. The *graces* and *virtues* that are most proper for it.
5. The *inconveniencies* and *miseries* which attend it.
6. The *privileges* and *comforts* peculiar to it.
7. And lastly, the *work* and *business* that is most needful in it.

Chapter 1. The DESCRIPTION of Old-age.

Section 1.

For the first, we must come to a *right notion of old-age*, partly by its name. The words which are used for it in the oriental languages, do only signify people or things that are durable, that have lasted long; and some of them are used promiscuously for such as are dignified by office, as well as for such as have filled their days. And none of them direct us in the computation, when it begins; but do comprehend as well those people that are *decrepit*, as those who are only *decayed*. For in [Genesis 18.11](#) Abraham was an *old man*; and in [Genesis 24.1](#). There he is called with the very same word — an old man, when he was then forty years older than before. The Hebrew commonly calling an old man, one full of days, or stricken in years, the sometimes they are distinguished, the aged with him that is full of days, [Jeremiah 6.11](#). By which it should seem, that *old-age* comes somewhat short of *fullness* of days.

The Greek words also for an old man do signify one that has lived long; or one that looks towards the earth; or whose vital moisture is dried away, and nothing but an earthy matter left. The Latin words for old-age, do signify multitude of years, or decay of strength: or precedence and priority of existence. But the most usual and proper word for it denotes a person, who has one foot in the grave, that is half dead already; the some derive it from the diminution of the senses, as if no body were old, until they were decrepit and began to dote.

It is clear, that there are divers periods in the life of man, which are like so many *stages* in the race which is set before us. Herein we have some light in the holy Scriptures. In [Leviticus 27.3](#), [4](#), etc. where one interval of time is, from a month to five years of age; a second, from five years of age to twenty; a third from twenty to sixty; and the last from sixty to the end of life.

And men's strength and ability, at least in those times and places, may be collected from their valuation, which is there adjusted by God himself. Humane authors have variously divided the life of man. Some into four parts, answering the four parts of the year; *spring, summer, autumn, and winter*. Others into seven; assigning each part of it to a different planet; and so old-age to Saturn. But man's age seems most fitly to be distributed into,

1. His *growing* age.
2. His *ripe* age.
3. His *decaying* age.

As to the first of these; we need not be so critical, as to begin it at his conception, or quickening in the womb, then he begins to live and to grow. We may distinguish his *growing* age into infancy, childhood and youth. Infancy ends when we begin to walk and speak. Childhood reaches to the fourteenth or fifteenth year; and youth lasts to twenty five. Unto these years we usually increase in strength or stature. Not but that some particular people, or in some countries do ripen sooner; and also that females are reckoned to attain to the second stage of their growing age, two years sooner, and to the third stage, four years sooner than the males; yet still the foresaid computation agrees with the male gender, and comprehends the generality of them.

The ripe age of man follows, when the parts of his body, and the powers of his soul are come to some consistency; and therefore it may be called his *best* state; as the Hebrew signifies in [Psalm 39.5](#) — his settled estate: truly every man at his settled, or best estate, is altogether vanity. The *former* state is the spring, *this* is the summer of a man's life; wherein those who are truly wise, will be gathering both temporal and spiritual provision for the winter of old-age. Now this rational flower is in its prime. As the flower of the field, so he flourishes, [Psalm 103.15](#).

Many indeed are cut down and *gathered* in their youth, and others are cut off in the midst of their mature days: for when the wind passes over this flower, it is gone. And it is observable, that Enoch in the first world, and Elijah in the second, and our dear Savior in the last, were called away in the midst of their days; to warn us, that this is not our country, but that even in the time of youth and strength, it behooves us to prepare for the eternal world. But if the Lord does still by his power and patience, hold our soul in life, this brings us to old-age; and this ripe age commonly lasts as long as our growing age, and so we may assign unto it, twenty five years more.

Section 2.

And so we are come to the third and last stage of life, the *decaying* age or **old-age**; which is the subject of the following discourse; which may be thus described, namely, that part of man's life, wherein through the multitude of years his strength is decayed.

For, 1. It is not merely such a number of years without some decay of nature, that can properly denominate old-age. In former times before the flood, when men usually lived eight or nine hundred years, he who was a hundred years old, was a very young man; and still we find that many are stronger at sixty, than others are at fifty years of age. Thus Athanasius testifies of Antony, that he had all his teeth, and his eyesight sound, when he was an hundred and five years old.

Neither, 2ndly. Does the decay of strength alone, determine a man old; as diseases and other casualties may weaken and wither him, who in respect of his age, has not attained the meridian of his life. Thus our blessed Savior was guessed to be near *fifty* years old, [John 8.57](#). When he was but little past thirty, being a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. *But when our strength is decayed through the multitude of years, then old-age commences.*

From whence it follows, that neither gray-hair, nor wrinkles, nor any such separable adjunct can be a demonstration of old-age; seeing sickness, or cares, or fears, or grief may produce these effects, without any considerable decay of strength, or number of years, [Proverbs 12.25](#). Heaviness in the heart of man, makes him stoop. Here the heart stoops like an old man, and that through heaviness. And [Psalm 6.7](#). My eye is consumed, because of grief, it waxes old, because of all my enemies; here grief brings old-age into the eye. And [Psalm 32.3](#). When I kept silence, my bones waxed old: here old age is ante-dated in the bones by trouble of mind.

Thus authors tell us of those, whose hairs have become hoary by sickness, and have grown black again at the return of health. The story of the Dutch captain is famous, who being put into a fright, had his hair turned gray in the space of one night. But all these being unnatural and accidental, do not constitute old age at all.

Neither does any occasional eclipse upon the internal faculties, the mind, memory or imagination, certainly declare old-age; for many accidents may produce these effects in the youngest people: whereas old-age is not incident to the soul. Its organs may be weakened or maimed either by natural decays, or by violent accidents, so that they cannot exert themselves; but the *soul* can never properly be said to grow old, because the nature of it is imperishable; and that which never perishes, can never be said to decay. But when natural heat begins to abate, when no food can sufficiently supply that radical moisture in the body, and when the digestive faculty is weakened; so that both the senses and members begin to feel a decay — then old-age has taken you by the hand, to lead you to your long home.

Section 3.

Now touching the *precise year* wherein old-age may be said to begin, it is not so material to be known, as it is doubtful to be fixed. But if we allow twenty-five years to the growing part of man's life, and reckon and twenty-five years more to the *ripe* or stayed part thereof, then does old-age ordinarily commence at fifty years of age. And there or thereabout many learned men have fix it, and then twenty-five years more will reach the end of most mens lives, or bring them to seventy five, an age wherein commonly men grow every way feeble, and have one foot in the grave.

It's true, a universal fixed period cannot be set herein; the diversity of mens natural constitutions, employments, diet, exercises, etc. causes old-age to come sooner to some, and slower to others. Some people through the happiness of their descent, have a better stock of natural vitality at their setting out than others — and consequently old-age seizes upon the person more slowly. Some people's *employments* do not spend or impair their vitals so much as others. Some people are nourished by more sound and vigorous food, than others are.

In short, a cheerful heart, a sober diet, and moderate exercise, may defer old-age for a time; but come it will at length. Even a house of stone will at last decay, and grow out of repair. "As water wears away stones and torrents wash away the soil, so You destroy man's hope. You overpower him once for all, and he is gone; You change his countenance and send him away!" [Job 14:19-20](#)

But this is plain, that there is a *vigorous* — and a *decrepit* old-age. During the former, natural abilities are not so decayed, as to render a man uneasy, or unserviceable. Abraham was an elderly man, [Genesis 18.11](#). He was old and well stricken in years, [Genesis 24.1](#). Being then about one hundred and forty years of age. [Genesis 25.8](#). He was old and full of years, being one hundred seventy and five — then he was very old.

Thus Jacob was an old man at one hundred and seven years, for Benjamin is called a child of his old-age, [Genesis 44.20](#). But he lived forty years after that, [Genesis 47.28](#). But then he was a very old-man; his eyes were dim, and he was confined to his bed.

In the former part of old-age, many enjoy a good consistency of mind and health of body; whereby they are very comfortable in themselves, and very capable of counseling and governing others. Yes, upon some accounts it may be esteemed the best parcel of our life; wherein our impetuous passions being already spent, we are furnished by great experience to be very *useful* in our generation. But when a man is arrived at the latter part of old-age, to be *feeble* and *decrepit* — then he grows uneasy to himself, and unserviceable to others. These days may be called *evil days*, and of these years it may be said, I have no pleasure in them, [Ecclesiastes 12.1](#).

Section 4.

The last period of old-age is death. Some indeed have been longer before they tasted of death, and some sooner; there is no certain definite year, wherein that *last friendly enemy* comes.

The antediluvians lived eight or nine hundred years. Those who were born after the flood, did scarce live half so long; for Arphaxad, who was born after it, lived but 440 years, [Genesis 11.13](#). And in the time of Peleg his grand-child, the age of man was shrunk half in half shorter; he lived only 239 years, [Genesis 11.21](#). And in the age of Nahor, great grandchild to Peleg, it fell to 150. [Genesis 11.25](#).

And so the ordinary term of man's life was by degrees curtailed, that in Moses' time, the days of his years were reckoned at threescore years and ten; and the strongest constitutions did reach but to fourscore years, [Psalm 90.10](#).

Howbeit, there have been in all ages of the world, some instances of such as have exceeded the ordinary standard; the causes and ends whereof are known only to God, in whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind, [Job 12.10](#). Thus we read of many in the primitive times of Christianity that lived on coarse food, and yet overpassed a hundred years.

Chapter 2. The CAUSES of Old-age, and PRESERVATIVES.

Section 1.

Having thus described old-age, I come now in the second place, to inquire into the true *causes* of it, and *preservatives* against it. For the **CAUSES** thereof.

First, the original meritorious cause is *man's sin* and defection from God. The truth is, it may seem somewhat strange, that man being created at the first in the image of the immortal God, placed but little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor, and made ruler over all other creatures — should have his life burdened with so many sorrows, and then so soon arrive at old-age and death.

And some of the heathen did foolishly charge nature with envy and cruelty towards man, in causing so *noble* a creature to tarry so short a time in the world, and to grow old as soon as he begins to grow ripe. And others as wisely concluded, that men were sent into this world only for their punishment, for crimes committed in others bodies before. And indeed, if you set the Scriptures aside which resolve the case, it is somewhat *unaccountable* to have so short a history of so noble a creature. If an intricate architect should frame and rear up a firm and stately building, and being completely furnished, the same should presently shrink, and in a short time decay and fall to the ground; passengers would be apt to call in question the fidelity or skill of him that made it; or exceedingly wonder by what means it came to ruin, until they come to know, that the inhabitant himself undermined, plucked down his own house. So in the case before us, it is matter of grief and astonishment to see the most exquisite piece of God's workmanship upon earth, to become decrepit in so short a space, and to be reduced so soon into dust and ashes!

We must know therefore, that man at his first creation being made up of a body and a soul, was neither in his own nature so unchangeable and immortal as the angels, nor so frail and weak as other creatures below. Not so *unchangeable*, I say, in his own nature; for having a body that was to be continually supplied with food, that is, repaired, it follows that, that which needs repair, is liable to decay. But yet while the sweet harmony, wherein it was first formed, was not disturbed, the frame might well have endured for a long time; especially, if the tree of life in Eden were intended, as some of the learned thought, to support, strengthen, and perpetuate life.

But the dismal fall of our first parents did so crush the *body*, and wound the *soul*, that neither of them can be recovered in this life. For as soon as man sinned, death, which was threatened to him, by degrees seized upon his *body*; and fear, shame and sorrow entered into his *soul*. And though the divine providence permitted him and divers of his posterity to live many hundreds of years, that the naked world might be peopled, and that religion with all other useful knowledge might be procured, preserved and propagated in the world; yet we date his *decaying* and *dying* state from that word, [Genesis 3.19](#). "For dust you are, and unto dust shall you return."

That righteous sentence brings our hoary hairs upon us. You turn man to destruction, and say, return you children of men — in the morning they are like grass which grows up. In the morning it flourishes and grows up, in the evening it is cut down and withers. [Psalm 90.3, 6](#).

If you inquire therefore into the ruins of human nature, the answer will be, that sin is the moth, which, being bred therein, has fretted the garment, withers the man, and lays his honor in the dust! Every decay therefore of our strength should remind us of our apostasy from God by the fall, and should renew our grief for the same. Whether Adam wept as oft as he l

ooked towards Paradise, is uncertain; but surely when we find our eye-sight fail us, our skin to wrinkle, and the pillars of the house to tremble — we should mourn for that woeful disobedience and ingratitude, which was the original cause of the decays of nature. When your eyes cannot do you service in seeing — then let them do it in weeping for this root of sin and misery.

Do not say that you no responsibility in what was done by another, long ago. For certainly we would never feel the effects, which we daily find to our smart, if we had no hand in the procuring cause of them. They who would persuade you, that no sin is inherent in you, but that its only contracted by imitation and custom, must needs yield that the decays, the feebleness and the withering; even of the most temperate man in the world, must proceed from some wound upon human nature, which the Creator would never have inflicted without a fault.

O therefore let us not only lament our *actual* and daily offences, but let us go up to the *spring*, and bewail that first rebellion, which is the root of evil both of sin and punishment! I say again, when your bones shake, and when your hand shakes, let your heart mourn for the sin that has poisoned your nature, and made you miserable! The body which was the instrument in the crime — is justly the subject in the punishment.

Section 2.

The *immediate* and *natural* cause of old-age, is the dryness and coldness of the temperament of the body. There is according to the old philosophy, a certain native heat and radical moisture ingenerated in all mankind at their conception, whereby life is preserved: the one is like the flame, the other like the oil that feeds it. Diseases and maladies are like a thief in the candle, that makes it wither the sooner: but if no such thing happens — yet the lamp will consume, and at last extinguish. All the supplies of food and medicine, are not able to maintain nor repair that heat nor that moisture, but a cold and dry temper grows upon the body, until it is quite exhausted and wasted.

It is true, some there are who have derived to them from their progenitors, a greater measure of radical heat and moisture, and therewith more lively and vigorous spirits; and these, meeting with no external inconveniences, do live longer in their strength, as may be observed in some families everywhere. Just as some good wines will preserve themselves from decay much longer than others; but at length they grow acid and spiritless — so eventually that *moth of mortality*, which lurks in all our bodies, will fret that garment into rags! No care or art can preserve these houses of clay, for as much as their foundation is in the dust, [Job 4.19](#).

Section 3.

The third sort of causes which may accelerate or hasten old-age, are such as these:

1. Unwholesome air. For the air, being the constant food of the vital parts, must needs contribute much to the repair or decay of the body; and the more impure it is, must consequently impair and weaken it. Hence and from the corruption of food it is not improbable, that the age of man, after the deluge became so much diminished; insomuch as Arphaxad, who

was the first-born in the new world, lived scarce half so long as those before the flood; as appears by comparing, [Genesis 5.27, 11.13](#). The air being now become more impure and unwholesome, than it was before. However it is most evident, that people do commonly at this day grow weak and feeble, who live in those places, which mourn under a malignant air; and others are fresh and healthy at the same years, that enjoy the blessing of a purer breathing.

2. Secondly, **diseases** are another cause that brings on old-age. For these must weaken that strength of nature, whereby our life is supported, [Psalm 39.11](#). When you rebukes correct man for iniquity, you make his beauty to consume away like a moth: and not only his beauty, but his strength and spirits — you make that which is desirable in him to melt away. And thus it was with holy Job. You have filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me, [Job 16.8](#). His grievous distempers had made him old before his time. Thus we daily see divers people, who, in respect of the number of their years, have not passed the meridian of their age — yet by reason of their sicknesses, and especially the dregs which some kinds of them do leave behind them, are old in their very youth. These are like storms without, which battering the best built house, will the sooner bring it unto ruin.

Holy David said of himself, [Psalm 119.83](#). I am become like a bottle in the smoke, that is, my natural moisture is dried, burnt up, and withered. And Hezekiah by reason of sickness complains, my age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherds tent, [Isaiah 38.12](#).

Thus the Lord does sometimes weaken a man's strength in the way, and shortens his days, [Psalm 102.23](#). Implying, that a man's life is like a journey through this world into another world; now by diseases he weakens us in the way, as we are traveling through the world, causes us to commence old age, and shortens our days: so that by this means, some have but a winters day of life, while others enjoy a longer.

3. Thirdly, another cause which hastens old age, is, **immoderate worry or labor**. Each of these, when they exceed a due proportion, do exhaust the spirits, and produce early wrinkles; where as, being moderately used, they do us no hurt, but good. It is indeed a part of the curse pronounced at the fall, on Adam and all his posterity, [Genesis 3.19](#). In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, until you return unto the ground; and the carking heart and sweating face, hastens man to the ground.

One of these alone, immoderate worry, or immoderate labor will do the work; but when the *mind* within is eaten up by continual thoughtfulness, and the *body* without is harassed with extreme labors, no wonder that weakness, languishment, and old-age hasten on apace. Then does our strength give place to labor and sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we fly away, [Psalm 90.10](#). Great indeed is men's folly thus to ruin themselves; as it is certain that neither our immoderate cares, nor our immoderate labor, do us any good at all: less care and more prayer would avail us much more; yes, and they do us much hurt, they disquiet the mind, they disturb the body, they provoke God to leave us to ourselves; and then we shall soon find, that it is vain to rise early, to sit up late, and to eat the bread of sorrow.

Whereas the blessing of the Lord, it makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it, [Proverbs 10.22](#). Assure yourselves, if moderate care and labor will not bring in riches, then they are n

not good for you; and whatever is gained otherwise, has a curse in it, and will bring misery on the body, or on the soul, here or hereafter.

4. A fourth cause which hastens old-age, is **intemperance**; that is, excess in eating, or in drinking, or in lustful embraces. Any of these, especially the last, bring old-age into youthful years. Sad it is, that our life being in its utmost extent so short, and our bodies by nature so frail; we, that have a desire to live, and who for that end will be content to use the most irksome remedies, should yet so commonly invite distempers by our luxury, and so shamefully *dig our graves with our teeth*, and deprive ourselves of the residue of our years.

In so much, that although in Hieroms time he affirmed that there were reckoned five thousand and martyrs for every day in the year; yet we may sadly conclude, that *Bacchus* and *Venus* have had daily more martyrs, if we may so call them, in one place or other of the world, than Jesus Christ.

From whence come for the most part those pains of the gout, stone, dropsy, convulsions and seizures, with such other distempers, but from intemperance in some of the foresaid objects? A moderate use of food, drink, and conjugal rights, as it does tend much to the alacrity of the mind, so does it no less to the health of the body: but *excess* in any of them, does either suffocate nature, or else impoverish and exhaust it; as it is observed of the more lecherous creatures, that they are short-lived in comparison of others.

If therefore you would arrive at a good old-age, good in respect of the comfort of the mind, or in respect of the welfare of the body, oppose and check your unruly appetites. Resolve with the grace of God, hitherto you shall come and no further. Conclude, I am a man, yes, a Christian, and not a brute; and consequently, am not to be guided by sense, but by reason and religion, which teach me to use all these outward comforts, so far as they will promote the glory of my maker, and the present and future good of my body and soul.

5. Fifthly, **inordinate passions** of the mind are another means to bring on old-age; such as *anger*, especially *sorrow*. For these manifestly prey upon the spirits, and also produce such bodily distempers, as do hurry people into old-age before their time. As hence it was, that Valentinian the emperor, by an excessive straining of his voice, in an angry reply against some offenders, fell into a grievous fever, which at length brought him to his end.

And for sorrow, the wisest of men tells us, [Proverbs 15.13](#). A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance; but by sorrow of the heart, the spirit is broken. And when the spirit is broken, the body must sensibly wither and decay. For these passions like a flood, break down, and overthrow all before them. You know a river, while it proceeds with its usual stream, passes harmlessly, yes, profitably through all the fields and meadows, and makes no breaches on the banks on either side; but when a sudden and excessive rain swells it up, then it lays about it without mercy, and tears up the ground, the fences and trees on every side. Just so our passions being moderate, are innocent and useful; but he who has no rule over his own spirit, is like a flood of water broke loose, or like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

Yes, there have been instances of such, as by sudden grief have grown gray in a few days time; and there are hundreds that carry the badge of their great sorrows on their heads, long before a due course of years would have brought them.

Let us not therefore allow these vultures to feed upon our hearts, nor yield ourselves slaves to these unruly passions; which war not only against the soul, but even against the body, and will ruin both, except they be restrained and mortified by the grace of God. Philosophy has gone far in this work — Christianity should go much further.

There are also other both moral and natural causes of old-age, but these may suffice. By these causes, you may easily discern what are the best preservatives against old-age. For the no art or care can prevent the unavoidable access thereof — yet effectual means may be used to defer it.

But the most effectual *preservatives* are,
1. Piety,
2. Sobriety.

Section 4. The **PRESERVATIVES** of old age

First, **serious piety**. By which I mean, a course of life in the faith, and fear of God, and in holy obedience unto him. This is that godliness, which has the promises of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come, [1 Timothy 4.8](#). This is the best *antidote* against that *poison* which has originally infected our nature, and which makes it swarm with distempers, that hurry us to old-age, and death at last. This is, certainly, the best means whereby to avoid that fatal curse so early pronounced, or else to turn it into a blessing.

"If you will walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and commandments, then I will lengthen your days," [1 Kings 3.14](#). "What man is he who desires life; and loves many days, that he may see good? Depart from evil, and do good, etc." [Psalm 34.12, 14](#).

Abraham is the first person called *old* in the Scripture; both Adam and Methuselah and many others were richer than he in years, but not in faith and obedience. I know, that some of the worst of men have, without piety, flourished long, and some that have been most religious, have withered quickly; and therefore do conclude, that all such outward blessings and afflictions are *conditionally* premised and threatened. And yet it abides certain, that the ordinary way to a vigorous age, and a long life, is the true fear of God; and that which makes it short and miserable, is ungodliness. And the holy Scripture is express herein, [Proverbs 10.27](#). "The fear of the Lord prolongs days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened." For doubtless, our Lord God, who is the *giver* of life, is also the *conservator* of it; and whose word we may rely upon, as the best prescription and preservative in this case. This holy course does contribute to this end:

1. In a **natural** way. And that,

1. By mortifying and discarding those sins which do more directly hurt the body. Such are those passions and excesses above-named, such is anger, envy, covetousness, ambition, and many such like, which like tornado rends and shatters the earth. I think there is no sin, wha

tever, but it has a malignant influence upon the body; either to disorder and inflame it, or to macerate and dispirit it.

Now the fear of God obliges a man not only to restrain, but to pluck up all such by the roots. Those are the *weeds*, which both rob the sweet flowers of their nourishment, and also depopulate the soil where they grow; which being cast out, the whole man fares the better after them. And,

2. True piety refreshes the body with the comforts of a good conscience. That peace, that hope, that joy which result from a conscience that is pacified by the blood, and purified by the spirit of Christ — does most efficaciously nourish the whole man, they daily feast him. This is the merry heart, that is called a continual feast, [Proverbs 15.15](#). And which does good like a medicine, [Proverbs 17.22](#).

There is that intimacy between the soul and the body, that whatever refreshes the one, does also cheer the other. Whereupon the learned have judged, that hope, love and joy are great prolongers of life, by the influence which these have upon the humours and spirits in the body: much more when these affections have heavenly and eternal things for their object: and the holy Scripture speaks that way, when it says, [Proverbs 19.23](#). "The fear of the Lord tends to life, and he who has it, shall abide satisfied."

3. True piety is the best preservative against old-age in a spiritual way, namely, by procuring the blessing of God. For when the body is consecrated to him, and employed for him, we may expect it to be blessed by him; it is under his peculiar care and providence. When it is united to Jesus Christ, it will receive influence from him for its good. So that true religiousness, the more it immediately tends to the recovery and felicity of the soul — yet it is really most friendly also to the body. He who fears God, and walks in his ways, shall see his children's children, [Psalm 128](#).

And on the other hand, all those destroying, and life-shortening diseases mentioned, [Deuteronomy 28](#). Even every sickness, and every plague, are denounced to the ungodly. [Ecclesiastes 8.12, 13](#). Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged — yet surely I know it shall be well with those who fear God, who fear before him. But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he fears not before God.

Therefore you that would protract the time of your flourishing strength, learn to love and fear God, devote yourselves to him, bestow your hearts upon him, employ your time and strength to please and honor him: abide not in a state of ungodliness, rest not with a form of godliness; but resolve upon that real holiness, which will produce a long and happy life in this world, and a longer and happier life in a better.

2. The second preservative against old-age, which indeed is contained in the former, is **temperance** and **sobriety**. I mean that gracious virtue, which retains the sensitive appetite within the bounds of reason and religion, whereby we keep a mediocrity in the use of foods, both in respect to their quantity, neither loading nor starving the stomach; and in respect of their quality, neither debauching it by too much rich food, nor injuring it by things noxious. T

the same care in *drinks*, lest the quality of them be pernicious, or the quantity of them harmful. That the marriage-bed be moderately used, so that the vital spirits be not exhausted.

Now man's sinful nature above all other creatures inclines to excess in all these: and it is pleasant to the flesh; but it is pleasure — or poison? At last they bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder, [Proverbs 23.32](#). Not the soul only, but the body. They do insensibly, but infallibly weaken nature, disorder the harmony of the parts, breed the most fatal distempers, and render him, as we may daily observe, old in infirmities, who is but young in years.

So that if those who give themselves up to gluttony, drunkenness or lasciviousness, did truly love their own souls, or yet their own bodies, they would bridle their unruly appetites for their own sakes, and not pay so dear for that which must be repented of. And as a plain and even way is much more delectable, than always to be going up hill and down; so certainly there is a thousand times more ease and sweetness in an even and temperate course, than in the perpetual unevenness of intemperance.

How could that body hold out, that is daily clogged and inflamed with unnatural excesses? The intemperate man is constantly feeding an enemy, whom it is charity to starve; and deals with his body as the ape, who is said to hug her young to death. Whereas a *wise sobriety* is health to the body, and marrow to the bones; by it the humours, the blood, the spirits are all maintained in order and in vigor. His meals are pleasant, and his sleep is sweet, and he is a stranger to those crudities, and consequent distempers which pester others. Seneca concludes, that there is no way to retard old-age like a frugal sobriety.

Let me then persuade all such, as are lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God or of their own souls — to have some pity on their poor bodies. O break off your destructive course, sow not the seeds of consuming maladies in your own flesh. Be not among wine-bibbers, among riotous eaters of food and wine. "Put a knife to your throat, if you be a man given to appetite!" [Proverbs 23.20](#). Give not your strength unto women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings, [Proverbs 31.3](#). Let not the *beast* captivate the *man*, nor your reason be enslaved by sense; but recover a just dominion over your blind and brutish affections, that your days may be long and lively in the land which the Lord gives you.

If it is here objected, that the most religious and temperate people grow old as soon as others. It is answered, that in these external things, all things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked. *Yet every wise man will take the likeliest course for the blessing he desires*. The some children that have had no good education, nor good example, have afterward proved eminent men; yet who but a desperate man will hereupon resolve, I will take no care about the instruction of my children? But the prudent parent will conclude, that some of the best education miscarry, and some with the worst flourish — yet I ought and will take the likeliest course to bring up my children in the fear of God.

Even so in this case, the old-age and death do seize upon divers pious and circumspect people, as soon or before they come upon others — yet is it the interest and duty of all such as regard God, or wish well to themselves, to use the fittest means to preserve their strength and vigor, until their time and work be done.

For it is certain, that when the success answers not the means, and that distempers, notwithstanding our piety and sobriety, do overtake us; then it is permitted and ordained by the wisdom of God for the setting forth some way of his glory, and for the real good of the party affected. For a holy and good God never makes exceptions to his general rules, but in cases reserved for his greater honor, and his servants greater good. For all the paths of the Lord, though never so cross and crooked, are mercy, I say, mercy and truth to those who keep his covenant, and his testimonies. [Psalm 25.10](#). And thus you have had some account of the true *causes*, and the best *antidotes* against old-age, which is the second point to be handled.

Chapter 3. The SINS of old-age.

Section 1.

I come in the third place to treat of the vices and sins, which are most incident to old-age: for the best wine, has some dregs. And there are none of old-folks sins, but they are found in some young-folks hearts; yet there are some particular vices, which are more proper, because more common to aged people, than to others. Nevertheless as the work of sanctification has been deeper, and the care in education greater, so far the less liable shall the aged people be, unto these corruptions. He who bears the yoke in his youth, will be happily fortified against them in his age. I do not therefore charge every old man or woman with the following faults; for many have better learned Christ, and are as free from them as any other: but for the most part aged people have a propensity to these vices.

First, **frowardness** or **peevishness**, whereby they are prone to be morose, wayward, and hard to be pleased; easily angry, often angry, and sometimes angry without a cause. Seldom are they pleased with others, scarce with themselves, no not with God himself! Yes, they think, as poor Jonah did, that they do well to be angry. Too apt they are to aggravate every fault to its utmost dimensions, and so never lack matter for unquietness.

Now this is both a sinful and miserable distemper. It is displeasing to God, and it is very uncomfortable both to themselves, and to others. Its true, that anger in itself is not evil: our blessed Savior was once angry, but it was at sin, and it was accompanied with grief for the hardness of their hearts. [Mark 3.5](#). *When we are angry at sin — we are angry without sin*. And it is also true, that aged people by reason of their knowledge in matters, do see more things amiss and blameworthy, more sin, and more evil in sin than others do; and having liberty by reason of their age and authority to speak their minds, they are too prone to express, that which others must digest with silence. And withal their bodily distempers dispose them to more *testiness* than others, whose continual health and ease makes their conversation more smooth and quiet. And lastly, they discern themselves in some danger of being despised, and therefore are tempted to preserve their authority by frequent and keen reproofs and reflections — and so they require too much, lest they should receive too little.

But though these things may abate the faultiness of this sin — yet they are far from being sufficient to *justify* the same. Some say, that this foppishness is their *disease* rather than their sin; yet the disease is the *effect* of sin, and *sin itself*. The mind is distempered by it, both your own and others; the body is disordered; unjustifiable words are spoken; the soul unfit

ed for any serious devotion; and the proper ends of reproof seldom attained. For *as the wrath of man never works the righteousness of God, so it rarely cures the iniquities of men*. The plaster being too hot, burns more than it heals; and the frequency of finding fault, tempts the faulty to heed it the less; yes, they are prone to harden themselves in evil, by retorting your unquietness upon you, as a sin you live in without reformation.

Strive therefore against this sinful infirmity: pray earnestly unto God for a meek and quiet spirit; overlook smaller slips; be not severe against involuntary faults; expect not the same wisdom or practice in young people, as you have in so long time attained; bridle the first emotions of anger; and weigh the nature and quality of a miscarriage, before you let fly at it, and do not kill a flea upon the forehead of your child or servant with a cudgel.

Go to school to your heavenly master, Christ Jesus, who was meek and lowly, who being reviled, reviled not in return, and when he suffered, threatened not. Give place to anyone rather than to the devil. Resolve if others cross you, that yet you will not punish them yourself; for frowardness hurts nobody so much as one's self.

And *mortify pride*, from whence, for the most part, these evil passions spring; for we are apt to assume so much, and value ourselves so highly, that we think every one should humor us; and *those who expect much, will meet with many disappointments*.

Say not, that the cure is impossible; for in all ages there have been instances of victories in this case. There was Patricius the father of Augustine, and there was Calvin, both of them naturally of hot and hasty spirits; yet did so moderate their temper, that an unkind word was scarce ever heard to come from them. Yes divers of the heathen were eminent herein; and doubtless the grace of God will not be lacking to you, if you sincerely seek it, which will of *lions*, make you *lambs*.

Section 2.

A second folly incident to old-age, is **loquacity** or **talkativeness**; that is, an exceeding proneness to speak much. It has passed into a proverb — that an old person is a *parrot*. Herein they are twice children, whose faculty you know lies in talkativeness.

Speech is a most wonderful and excellent faculty conferred only on human nature, and for their common good — and it is great pity that it should be abused. As our *reason* begins to work, so our *speech* comes in; which shows that *all our words should be governed by reason*. And yet how unruly is this little member! Insomuch as the apostle James calls the tongue, *a world of iniquity*. The *hand* is not called a world of iniquity, for that cannot reach very far; but with the tongue we can walk over the whole world, and by its venom, can hurt even all mankind. aged people, whose eyes and ears, whose hands and feet are much decayed and disabled, are apt to make the greater use of their *tongues*.

And whereas the noblest and best subject of discourse is the ever blessed God, his attributes, word and works — too few of the elderly speak of these things. But the ordinary theme of their speech, is gossip concerning other folks, and concerning themselves — and here you may find in their tongues the perpetual motion. About others, their tongue travels round ab

out, and few of their neighbors escape the *scourge* of it. It is their delight to be judging, censuring, and condemning all mankind.

How much good might the same breath produce, if it were employed in *good instruction*, in *faithful counsel* or in *wise reproof*? But their talent lies not that way, but rather like Zoilus of old, who being asked why he carped so much at others, answered, that he *spoke* ill of them, because he could *do* no other ill to them. So the feebleness of aged people must be a plea for their ill language. But God will reprove you, and set this and all your other sins before you, because you sit and speak against your brother, and slander your own mother's son, [Psalm 50.20, 21](#).

But their most pleasing harangues are concerning *themselves*. What they have *been*, what they have *done*, what they have *had*, what strength, what beauty, what estates, what affairs they have managed, what adventures they have made, what victories they have gotten. In sum, wherever the story begins, it shall be sure to end at *their dear selves* — the feats they have done, or the respect they have received.

Now all this must be nauseous to every sincere hearer, and is most loathsome in the sight of God. For he and his glory is the only center, towards which all our words and actions should tend. All other discourse is no other or better, than wherein Turks and pagans may vie with you. Our blessed book assures us, [Matthew 12.36](#), "That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

If all your excessive words in one day should be written down, and presented at night to you, it would amaze you; how then will you answer whole volumes of them at the day of judgment? Say not, that *words are but wind*; since they are such a wind as, if irregular, will blow the soul into Hell! For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.

Bridle therefore, this unruly member. Nature has placed two bars unto the tongue, the teeth and the lips; but except watchfulness and prayer be added to them, these two bars will be too weak. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, [James 3.2](#). And you will confess, that every man should labor to be perfect in his profession; especially you that are old disciples, and should exceed others in strict holiness, as much as you do in years.

Consider, that He who often said, *let him that has ears to hear, hear*, said *not*, let him that has a tongue to speak, be ready to speak. No, he has given to men two ears, and but one tongue; to show that we should be swift to hear, but slow to speak. It is true, as Elihu grants, [Job 32.7](#), "Those who are older should speak, for wisdom comes with age!" Their knowledge and experience qualifies them for it; and if young people would but see their own weakness, and were modest and humble, they might with much ease learn those things from the elderly, which they have dearly bought.

Talkativeness, which is culpable in aged people, is utterly intolerable in young ones. But yet even by those who are old, both the *matter* and the *measure* of their talk is to be observed. You should consider: what good shall I now procure by speaking? Where is my tongue walking? What am I hurting by my silence? What words are these, that are bursting out of my mouth?

Plutarch resolved that we would never speak, but when it is some way *necessary*, or *useful* to ourselves, or others.

And that was a nipping answer, which Zeno the philosopher gave to some ambassadors that were come to Athens, and had feasted some learned men there, who had talked liberally to them: and what, said they to him, have *you* to tell us? Why, says he, tell those who sent you, that you met with one old man, who knew how to hold his tongue.

And a wise man resolves, that he who has knowledge, who of all men may best speak — *spares* his words, [Proverbs 17.27](#). And you whose temperament prompts you to be talkative, should not be so prodigal herein. He was a wise man who said, he had often repented that he spoke, but never that he held his tongue.

Let the glory of God, and the profit of the hearer be still the *measure* of your talk. Do not hunt after the applause of men, which is but empty air. And remember, that you may never justly *commend* yourself — but when you are unjustly accused by another. And then consider that the more a man speaks — commonly the less he is heeded! Therefore if you would have people to mind what you say, check your loquacity, and take notice how the wise man places *silence* before speech, saying, [Ecclesiastes 3.7](#). There is a time to keep silence — and a time to speak.

Section 3.

The third sin more peculiar to old-age, is **envy**, which is an inward grudging at those who in anything excel us. Now because those who are old do see many that surpass them in strength, beauty, riches or esteem — they are too apt to look at them with an envious eye, and to grudge them those blessings which God has given them. Hence it is but too usual with them, to lessen their deserts, to carp at their enjoyments, to abound in all such reports and stories, as may degrade or blacken them — thinking that what is detracted from others, is added to themselves — which is a great mistake. Thus when a house is decaying, all the props men can get, they will buttress it up withal: but these are but rotten pillars, and will but expose you to more contempt.

For this is *an odious sin* in itself: from hence proceeded the fall of the first Adam, and the death of the second, for which mischiefs we should hate it the more. And indeed it is a very *unreasonable* thing to envy those mercies to others, whereof we have had our share as well as they. Are they strong, lovely or respected? You have in your time partaken of them — so why should you grudge at those who do but come after you?

It is as if the southern gardener, who has reaped his harvest in July, should repine at those who live more northerly, whose harvest is in September! Why, the former had his harvest as well as the other; and has reason rather to be thankful to God, than to envy those who follow him. Besides, would you have *two* harvests? What answer can you give to our saviors questions, [Matthew. 20.15](#), "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is your eye evil, because I am good?" He who grudges at God's gifts, would make a miserable distribution of them among men, if they were at his disposal. No no, younger people have their proportion of loveliness, strength, estate, honor and abilities — and you have yours; and they

are distributed by a wise hand, who is ever righteous in all his ways, and holy all in his works.

And therefore labor with all your might to extinguish this cursed flame. Remember that wrath kills the foolish man, and that envy slays the silly one, [Job 5.2](#). You envy others, but you hurt yourselves. Few sins have a more malignant influence upon mind and body, than this sin of envy. On the other side, if you bless the Lord for other mercies, you have the comfort of them; if you repine at them, you lose the comfort of your own.

I know that the spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy, [James 4.5](#). But to those who seek it, God gives more grace. Be contented with such things as you have. It is not said, with such things as:

1. You *have* had, or such things, as
2. *Others* have, or such things as
3. You *would* have —

but with such things as you have, because he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. If you have him — you have enough; if you have him not — you lack all good things.

Let Him who is infinitely wise have liberty to dispose his gifts as he pleases — and instead of grudging at the excellencies of others, labor for something in yourselves to balance them.

Your *gravity* will be as valuable as their beauty,
your *wisdom* will be as valuable as their strength,
your *grace* will be as valuable as their wealth.

They do but surpass you in things that will fade as yours have done — but you may excel them in things which are everlasting.

Besides, you should consider, that we are all fellow-members of the same body, and so we should rejoice in their welfare and in their comforts. This is the way to bring them to sympathize with us in our defects. And those who pay respect to those above them, shall most usually receive it from them below them; whereas the envious man takes pleasure only in punishing of himself.

Section 4.

The fourth vice too common to old-age, is **arrogance** and **conceitedness**. A mind-set whereby they assume so much to themselves, as if they had a monopoly of wisdom to themselves, and that their word must be a law in all cases, so that they can endure no contradiction. It is likely enough that Job's friends had a spice of this distemper: for they were very aged, [Job 32.6](#). And we find them very wise in their own conceit. And it is most true, as before, that the aged should speak, and that they are most likely to be in the right. Happy had Rehoboam been, if he had acquiesced in the counsel of the old men: for which is abler to advise — those who are only helped an active imagination and a fluent tongue — or those who have read many men, as well as many books, and have weighed things as well as words, and by experience are grown wise?

These people may certainly expect, that a great regard be given to their opinions. But yet as Job says in 32.9, "Great men are not always wise, neither do the aged always understand judgment." All aged people have not a patent for infallibility, nor does anyone at all times. Old Nicodemus knew not what it was to be born again, though he were a teacher in Israel; and I greatly fear he has his fellows in all ages and places. Sometimes old men dream dreams, and young men see visions, as [Joel 2.28](#).

The Almighty will not confine his gifts, no more than he does his graces to any order of men; and therefore no man should think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to every man, [Romans 12.3](#). And accordingly, the *aged* are exhorted, [Titus 2.2](#), "In the first place to be sober." It befits no man to abound always in his own conceit, or to dictate in every company; but rather according to the Levites method, [Judges 19](#).

Consider the matter, take advice — and then speak your minds. The Spirit of God dwells not in a proud heart: "Pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth — he hates!" [Proverbs 8.13](#).

Check therefore and mortify this sinful temper. Mind the apostles counsel, [Romans 12.16](#), "Be not wise in your own conceits." Let not your counsels beg respect by the number of your years, but command it by the weight of your reasons; so there will be more of God than of man in your counsels. Believe it, neither great age, nor great honor, nor both together do infuse wisdom! For Solomon has said, "better is a poor and a wise child, than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished," [Ecclesiastes 4.13](#).

Why should you therefore imagine, that wisdom must needs live and die with you? That your words must be always *oracles*? O labor for more humility, and be content with your proper measure.

Know for certain, that all conceitedness comes from pride — which cleaves to a man even to the grave! Consider how the Scripture disgraces this pride of yours, [Proverbs 26.12](#), "Do you see you a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him!"

Reflect sometimes, how *often* you have been mistaken, even wherein you have been extremely confident. He must be *omniscient*, who is always infallible. Let God be true, but every man a liar. Young Elihu may sometimes out-strip Job and his three friends, and *no mere man is wise at all times*.

Section 5.

The fifth and most epidemic sin of old-age, is **covetousness** or **worldly-mindedness** — that is, an inordinate love of riches, which is shown in an insatiable endeavor to procure them, and in an unreasonable reluctance to part with them. Though this vice be frequently found in young people, as in that young man in [Matthew 19.22](#). Who was free from other gross sins, but infected with this; yet it is a disease more peculiar to old-age.

They feel the decays of nature, and think to support themselves by their abundance. They must have some recreation, and are by reason of their age incapable of other pleasures, an

d so do place their delight in heaping up riches, as some of them have sincerely acknowledged. They also know that their weakness and infirmities expose them to contempt, and therefore endeavor to obviate that by their wealth, and so make themselves considerable by their estates. These are their *crutches*, which when weakness overtakes them, they lean upon and support their fainting spirits withal.

And they do not lack variety of *pretenses* and *excuses* whereby to justify their course: as that they are only providing for a rainy day, for troubles and casualties that may befall them; that they ought to lay up for their children and posterity, or else they were worse than infidels; yes, even that they are gathering only to bestow it at their death on some pious or charitable use.

And Satan is not lacking to nurse this selfish attitude in them, by suggesting to them expectations of a long life, a distrust in the providence of God, and continual fears of poverty: which is nursed by the coldness of their temper, and by their consciousness of their inability to get much by their labor: and these meeting with that *inveterate self-love*, which is inherent in them, and consequently an uncharitable frame of mind towards others, hardens them in their tenacious temper; so *that as their bodies grow weaker, this lust grows stronger*, until divine grace does open their eyes, or else the earth at last stop their mouths!

This *bitter root* spoils their devotions, interrupts their prayers, and renders the word of God tasteless. Covetousness disturbs their rest; the thoughts and cares about these things visit them last at night, and meet them first in the morning, and disquiet them the day throughout; for where the treasure is, there will the heart be also. *Oh the cares, the fears, the vexations that possess a covetous heart!* We can somehow digest anything that we delight in, though it is never so bitter — else no man could endure the life of a *covetous miser*.

But it is the old-man's recreation; the best of his time and the strength of his thoughts are consumed, either about the *keeping* of what he has, or about *getting more*: for as he has *no vent* for his abundance, so he observes *no limits* for his desires. As the balloon, the more it is filled with air, it stretches the more; so the more his riches increase, the more his heart is set upon them; so that he sees more beauty in his money, than in the sun the skies. No thoughts, no discourse, no design pleases them — except it ends in gain! And when there is an opportunity of doing good, the *heart* is cold, and the *hand* is lame. Nay some of them will not afford conveniences, scarcely *necessities* to their families or to themselves, but run in debt to their own backs and bellies, to their children and servants, and foolishly choose to *live poor*, that they may *die rich*.

"Covetousness, which is idolatry!" [Colossians 3:5](#). Now this vice in itself it is plain *idolatry*, and the root of all evil, leading men into temptation and a snare, into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which at last drown men in destruction and perdition! [1 Timothy 6:9, 10](#). For the worldly

man	gets	and	keeps	his	estate	.	.	.
with	much	labor	to	his	body,			
with	vexation		to	his	spirit,			
with	scruple		to	his	conscience,			
with	danger		to	his	soul,			
with	envy	of		his	neighbors,			

with lawsuits to his children, and
with a curse to his posterity!

Do but turn to [Job 20.15](#), "He swallows down riches and vomits them up again; God casts them out of his belly!" But in no sort of men is covetousness so unaccountable, so very foolish as in aged people. For what can be more absurd (said a heathen) than to be so much concerned for *traveling expenses*, when we have so small a part of our way to travel? Or as Augustine expresses it, to load ourselves with the greatest burdens, when we are nearest the end of our journey? It is no doubt a plain infatuation, and an instance of the power of the prince of this world on mens minds, and of the corruption of our nature to effect this; that those who have seen the vanity of all these things, the uncertainty, the unsatisfactoriness, the vexatiousness of them — should so dote upon them! That those who not only know, but even feel in themselves, that they *must shortly*, and *may suddenly* — leave them all, and perhaps have no thanks at all from those who enjoy them; that yet these people, wise in other things, should set their hearts upon them, and *hunt after a world that is flying from them*.

How much more comfortable were it, to do all the good they can? To feed the hungry, clothe the naked, to procure the prayers of the distressed, while they have opportunity? To make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, to be esteemed of men, to be loved and honored God! A godly man shows favor and lends: he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved forever, the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance, [Psalm 112.5, 6](#).

The pleas which they produce for their justification or excuse, are all insufficient. Have you no other recreation? Surely, there are more and better diversions, natural, artificial, and spiritual, than *heaping up riches*. Instance but in the last of these, [Psalm 119.14](#), "I have rejoiced in the way of your testimonies, as much as in all riches: yes, the law of your mouth is better unto me, than thousands of gold and silver!"

Again, do you think that riches will defend you from contempt? True piety and charity is a far better way, [Psalm 112.9](#), "He has dispersed, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever: his horn shall be exalted with honor." Do you think that in your decays of nature, there are no better supports, than your riches? Yes . . .
the favor of God,
the love of Christ,
the comforts of the Spirit,
the feast of a good conscience, and
the joyful hopes of eternal happiness —
are as much beyond them, as the sun is brighter than a glow-worm.

Will providing for contingencies excuse you? Alas, your riches will be no certain refuge for you, [Proverbs 18.10, 11](#). The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runs into it and is safe. The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall (but 'tis only) in his own conceit. That promise, sealed to us, is worth all your jewels, and all your estates: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." [Hebrews 13:5](#)

Can you justify your immoderate scraping, by a just provision for your children and relations? No, no, that's but an excuse; for those who have no children, are as sick of this disease as others! But if you have children, this course of yours is the way to *undo* them. A moderate care for posterity, is a duty, wherein we may expect a blessing. But the covetousness of the parent, does but provide for the luxury of the child, and so the parent's soul is ruined in the *getting* — and the child's soul is ruined in the *spending* of what is so gotten. If your posterity fear God, they shall lack no good thing, they shall have enough. But if they do not fear God, they will have too much — God will be dishonored, and themselves undone forever.

Neither will religious purposes of doing some good with your estates, excuse your present penuriousness: for that is to do evil, that good may come of it. Hear what God himself says to this, [Isaiah 61.8](#). "For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery for a burnt offering." Those who will part with nothing while they live — nothing will be accepted from them when they die. Plead not your unspotted justice, honesty and equity, against this charge. For though fraud, injustice and oppression are sometimes the effects of covetousness — yet the nature of covetousness stands in over-loving the world; and so you may be damnably guilty of this sin, though you keep you within the limits of your estate.

For as a man may be guilty of immorality with his own wife, and be drunk with his own drink — so a man may be covetous with his own riches. We do not find that the rich *fool*, [Luke 12](#), nor that the rich *glutton*, [Luke 16](#) — did other folks wrong; nor those on the left hand of Christ, [Matthew 25](#) — that they robbed the poor or wronged the needy, but yet all were guilty of this accursed vice.

Strive therefore to break this snare; and to this end:

1. Consider the absolute vanity of all these worldly things; that is, they are not able to satisfy the mind, or to cure the body, or to honor your name, or to lengthen the life, or to save the soul. All this has been proved, and concluded by Solomon a king of vast knowledge and experience.

And their vanity is yet further seen in their *uncertainty*, there being an hundred ways to rend them from you, and as many ways to rend you away from them!

And are they not vain then? And why will you set your eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle towards Heaven! [Proverbs 23.5](#).

Consider again the *end* for which these things are bestowed upon you, which is, that you should employ them, and use them for God. He does hereby try you, whether you will deny yourself, whether you will glorify him, whether you will lay *out* your money, or lay it *up*.

God makes some people poor — that he may exercise their patience and humility; and others he makes rich — to exercise their bounty and their charity. In short, *riches were never given to any man to spend upon his lusts*, or to hoard them up without just cause; but to do good withal, first to yourselves, then to your families and relations, and then to others. When they are not thus employed, you utterly pervert the end for which you are entrusted with them.

Consider also, that you are but *stewards* in your estates, and you must give a just *account* of them to him. All that you possess is only God's stock in your hands — it is not your own. The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness of it. If you really believed this, you would never pinch or grudge to yourself or others, that which is necessary. For what is it to a steward, when his lord and master shall order him to give so much to his tenant, or pay so much to another poor man? And why cannot you, who are only stewards to the God of Heaven and earth, of that estate which is in your hand, when you can discern that he requires it? I say, why cannot you give, forgive, lend, lay out freely, for none of it is your own?

And whether will it pass better in your accounts; so much left in bags or bonds, or to a *prodigal* heir — or so much of it spent in hospitality, so much in prudent charity?

And lastly, consider the plain command and blessed promise of God in that foresaid, [Hebrews 13. 5](#). Let your conversation be without covetousness — for he has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you. You shall have that which is sufficient, or, you shall have *him* who is all-sufficient.

2. Pray earnestly against this sin. Let your eyes be ever towards the Lord, to pluck your feet out of this cruel net. Without his divine grace, this snare will be too strong for you. There are medicines to purge diseases, but none to purge covetousness. No, this lust is rooted only in the soul, the bodily complexion is very little concerned: and therefore you have the more need to cry earnestly to God with David, [Psalm 119.36](#). "Incline my heart unto your testimonies, and not to covetousness!"

3. Labor for faith to believe what God has revealed, and to rely upon what he has promised. When you plead for your selfish penurious course, that *you must live* — I counsel you to learn the life of faith. For if you did believe the revelation which God has made of his nature and covenant, if you did believe the judgment to come, and the everlasting world after it, if you did believe the promises or the threatenings which refer to this affair — then you would readily despise all the things of this world, and set your affections on things above. You would, as you ought, be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to give, laying up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that as this life is slipping from under your feet, you may lay hold on eternal life, [1 Timothy 6.18, 19](#).

Section 6.

These are the most actual sins of old-age. Some other sins there are, which because they are neither so common to all aged people, nor yet peculiar to them, and yet are more often found in them than in others, I shall not wholly conceal them, but rather more briefly handle them. Which are,

1. Craftiness, which is prudence degenerated. aged people have had much dealing in the world, and have seen, yes, perhaps felt the effects of other men's sinister behavior; and being too much devoted to a selfish interest, do thereupon too often strain a point of equity and integrity, to gain their own ends. If this subtlety were only employed for their own security, it were less culpable; but when it is an engine to ensnare, or to over-reach their brother — it is inexcusable.

When a crafty old miser has a young prodigal in his *talons*, what work does he make with him! What cunning arts, what tricks and stratagems has he to distill his estate into his own coffers? But this is a baseness unfitting a moral heathen, who would put himself into another's case, and deal with him as he would be used by him. How enormous then is it for a Christian, who ought by no means to live to himself, that should remember he is but a stranger in this earth, and is seeking a better country, who is a professor of self-denial and sincerity!

Beware therefore of this unworthy trade: believe, that what you save or gain by wily ways, brings to you a curse along with it; resolve, that if you cannot stand by plain dealing, to fall with it, your fall will be glorious. *Esau* was a cunning fellow, but *Jacob* was a plain man, and so should all his offspring be.

But if you will needs be exercising your talent, employ it in a holy contriving, which way to do good to your neighbor. So did Paul, [2 Corinthians 12.16](#). Being crafty, I caught you by deceit, but he sought not theirs, but them. You may also exercise your utmost prudence, in the preserving your outward estate and credit; provided always, you do it not out of an inordinate affection to these things, nor to the injury or harm of any other: for that which does harm to your neighbor, will never do good to you, there being a just God who, [Job 5.13](#), "Takes the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong."

2. Unteachableness. When the fault is only in the understanding or memory, it is rather matter of pity, but when it is in the will, it is highly criminal. Now this is a fault very incident to old-age, yes, the more ignorant, the more obstinate. Hence we read, [Ecclesiastes 4.13](#), "Of an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished." They think it a disgrace to learn; they are more ready to teach, than to learn. It's grown proverbial, *they are too old to learn*. Indeed if the things propounded are unnecessary and useless, you may safely remain in your ignorance; but if they are proper either to your civil or spiritual calling, it is a greater shame to be ignorant of them, than to learn them: especially in the great points that are necessary to salvation. How many instructive discourses have you heard about these things, and how little have you learned? You have your lesson to get, and your Master is just about to come!

O therefore beg of God and man to teach you, and do not grudge to take somewhat the more pains to redeem your former negligence.

Cato learned the Greek tongue, when he was an old man. And Solon glories in this, that he was still learning something in his old-age. How many famous divines have learned the Greek and Hebrew in their old-age? Why should you think yourselves too wise or too good or too old to learn whatever may make you more useful here, or more happy hereafter? It will be small comfort for you to say, I am rich, and have need of nothing — when you shall be found at last, to be poor, and blind, and naked.

3. Implacableness is charged as a fault common with aged people. That is, such a *deep resentment* against such as offend them, as is scarce abolished. On the one hand, their feebleness is such, by reason of their age, that they cannot easily revenge themselves; and on the other, their thinking, sedentary, and wakeful condition gives them opportunity to roll their disgusts in their minds, until they are boiled into a settled rancor. Thus those who in malice

e should be children, and in understanding should be men — are on the contrary men in malice, and children in understanding! They are not apt to forgive — and not easy to forget.

The melancholy and stiffness of old-age, will not suffer such impressions to wear off, and their humor disposes them to aggravate things to the utmost. So that the contentions of aged people, like those among brethren, are like the bars of a castle. They will owe a man an ill-urn seven long years together, and then pay him at last.

But this is an inhuman, and ungodly temper. Would you have everyone deal so by you? Have you offended nobody in all your course? What *brute* continues an everlasting rage? Would you be so treated by the great God, when you have offended him? How can you pray in this condition without cursing yourselves? If you do not forgive — you cannot be forgiven.

I am sure the affronts and injuries which you have received from men, are not to be compared to those which you have offered to God. Away then with this devilish distemper; make your neighbor sensible of his offence, by a cool representation of it to him, by yourself if possible, or else by some fit friend — perhaps you may gain him. By revenge you can be but even with him, but hereby you will get above him, and conquer him. However do not you punish yourself for his aversion, by allowing a fire in your bosom, which will hurt your own soul, more than it does your neighbor. You nullify all the good that is in him, and all the kindness that you have received from him. But muster up all his worthy qualities, and all the former respects and benefits that you have received from him, and this will melt you into a better temper.

And especially make it your earnest request unto God, to root up this gall and wormwood out of your heart, and that he would make you tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.

4. Speculative wickedness is another sin too incident to old-age. That is, either reflecting upon former sins, or imagining others with delight. There is a threefold delight in sin: *before* its commission, by contrivance; *in* the commission by present satisfaction, and *after* the commission by remembrance.

And as the set purpose before, so the delightful reflection afterwards, is a sin before God.

Now weakness of body, poverty in estate, or other impediments may hinder aged people from those sins which they inwardly love, or in which they have heretofore actually lived: but yet they ruminates on them with pleasure, and reenact them in their imagination. They do not, and perhaps they cannot now fight and quarrel as they have done, nor commit immorality as they have done, nor drink and debauch themselves as they have done — but they can reflect upon these things with contentment. Strength and opportunity are lacking, but their *hearts* are as wicked as ever. Hence it is, that you shall hear divers aged people rehearsing their former disobedience to parents, their refractoriness to their masters, their petty purloinings, and other extravagances, with as fresh delight as they were at first committed.

Now this is in effect to act over those sins again: [Ezekiel 23.19](#). She multiplied her whoredoms in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in t

he land of Egypt. Yes, perhaps this guilt will be found in some respects greater than the first: because it's likely that then there was less knowledge, and more temptation, than now there is. This contemplative wickedness adds on the former guilt, and contracts more. This demonstrates that the man would be always sinning, if he could; and that he is a mere stranger to true repentance.

I deny not, but that the first sudden glance of the memory upon former vanities may be pleased, but 'tis only a surprise; every pious soul has them still in remembrance, and is humbled in it. Thus holy Augustine in his confessions reflects upon his robbing an orchard in his younger days, with all the heart-breaking aggravations imaginable. Thus holy David cries out, [Psalm 25.7](#), "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions!"

Labor to write after their copies; let the remembrance of your former follies be always bitter: never dwell upon the thoughts of them, but with a sigh. "O what a fool, what a beast have I been! O what have I done! I am ashamed, yes, even confounded, because I bear the reproach of my youth!" [Jerem. 31.19](#). Make not the wound to bleed again by rubbing it afresh, lest it fester and grow incurable at length.

A diligent care to avoid the sins of your present age and state, will be a good proof that you would not commit the faults that are past, if you were to live over your life again. *A better life* is the best repentance.

And so much shall suffice upon this *unpleasant* but *necessary* subject, concerning the sins of old-age. Which as they should be matter of our hearty grief, so they should be the subject of our holy jealousy and continual caution. For the perhaps we may not be guilty in them all — yet it is as unlikely that we are *clear* in all. So that wherever the Spirit of God found us out, it is our indispensable duty to watch and pray with all *seriousness* and *steadfastness* against the same; and though they are rooted never so deep, we must mortify and pluck them up, though we should pluck our very hearts up with them. For as one disease is sufficient to kill the body; so any one sin unmortified, is able to send body and soul into Hell.

On the other hand, it will be one special token, that we are upright before God, when we keep ourselves from our own iniquity, [Psalm 18.23](#).

And yet this is but the half of our bounden duty. For if you pluck up all the weeds out of your garden, it will be but a desert place, unless you procure some herbs and flowers therein: so though we should clear our hearts of these vices, we shall have but naked and empty souls, unless we be furnished with such *graces* as are proper for us: which is the next point now to be treated of.

Chapter 4. The GRACES of old-age.

Section 1.

Forasmuch as old-age is liable to so many wicked habits, it greatly concerns all that are in years, to excel in some eminent *virtues* and *graces*, which may preponderate the other; or else old-age would be a miserable age indeed. Now the we may well hope, that they having been so long in Christ's school, have thoroughly learned Christ — that they are endued with

every grace, and instructed to every good work. Yet there are some particular graces, wherein the aged do or should excel.

Not that any of them is confined to gray hairs alone: for as all the sins above-mentioned may be found in those who are young — so also the following graces do apparently shine in many of them, whereby they promise a plentiful harvest in after-time, if they persevere in them.

For alas, to speak the plain truth, too few *possess* them all, and too many are *strangers* to them all. And therefore where I describe them with the following excellencies, understand it rather by way of instruction, in what they *should* be, than by way of assertion of what they are; and you must remember also, that the better sort have them, and all should endeavor after them: for since these virtues and graces are actually possessed by some — they may be certainly obtained by all.

The first grace most proper for old-age is **KNOWLEDGE**. They have or might have a great measure of all kind of knowledge, having read so much in the *book of nature*, and in the *book of providence*. But there is a nobler object of their knowledge, which is God himself — his word and his ways: herein the aged person has been versed for a long time, [1 John 2.13](#), "I write unto you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning."

There is no truth, duty, case, sin, or temptation, but they have either heard, or read something concerning it, and that often; and therefore must be supposed to have a more clear and distinct knowledge in all these things, than younger people. Young people think that they know much, but aged people cannot choose but sigh and smile at their ignorance. They find that the more *knowledge* they have, the more *ignorance* they discover in themselves; and wherein they have been confident in their younger years, they see cause to alter their sentiments afterwards.

For knowledge is either learned by experience — or acquired by study, reading and conversation. In these the aged must needs out-strip the young, as having been much longer conversant in the use of them. The Holy Spirit does commonly impart these graces, virtues and habits in the use of means; and so every way the old man has the advantage in this accomplishment.

Now knowledge is that wherein the image of God partly consists — it is the glory of angels, and it is the honor of man. Those therefore were a strange sort of Friars in Italy, that Luther writes of, who took a solemn oath, that they would know nothing at all, but answer to all questions with "I don't know." These men were resolved to renounce both divinity and humanity at once.

No, doubtless, saving knowledge is to the soul, as the eye to the body — of great excellency and of great use. 'Tis knowledge that crowns the hoary head, and conveys beauty unto wrinkles, [Proverbs 14.18](#), "The prudent are crowned with knowledge."

It is true, many there are, who have tasted of the *tree of knowledge*, who have never tasted of the *tree of life*. And knowledge of itself puffs up, so that a man may have all knowledge, and yet no love, [1 Corinthians 13.2](#). Yet as it is true, *there may be much knowledge with*

out a grain of grace; so it is certain, there cannot be one spark of grace without knowledge. For how shall a man know sin, unless he understands the law of God? How can he embrace Jesus Christ aright, except he knows him? Or build for Heaven without a foundation?

Now the aged person has lived long, has conversed both with men and books, has the *rust of natural ignorance well scoured off*. If he has not more *riches* than others — yet surely he has more *knowledge*, especially if he has put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him, [Colossians 3.10](#). And therefore though it is a brutish thing in anybody, to be ignorant in those things that concern their happiness — yet it is intolerably absurd for one that is *old in years*, to be a *child in understanding* — to be like the old man, which Mr. Pemble tells of one who had heard two or three thousand sermons, being above sixty years old. Yet being examined by a minister on his death-bed concerning his knowledge of God. The man thought that he *himself* was a good old man; concerning Christ, that he was a godly man; concerning his *soul*, that it was a great bone in his body; and concerning his *future estate*, he said, "if he had done well, he should be put into a pleasant green meadow." What a woeful thing is this, that a constant hearer of the gospel as this man was, should live and die in such gross ignorance?

There is no *trade* however difficult, but seven or eight years will teach it; what a shameful thing then is it to be sent into the world, purposely to learn to be a true Christian, and after fifty or sixty years to remain ignorant in the basics of it? To be ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth, [2 Timothy 3.7](#). Certainly an ignorant old person is the shame of Christianity, yes, of humanity itself.

Let it therefore be your study that are ripe in years, to be ripe in judgment, to be well-grounded in the knowledge of God and godliness. While others are heaping up *riches* — you treasure up *knowledge*. The knowledge of natural things, as also of civil affairs will *adorn* you; the least grain of this is more excellent than many talents of gold; but the least grain of spiritual and divine knowledge, is more valuable than all the natural and civil knowledge under Heaven!

Hence it is reported of Albertus Magnus, that, before his death, he prayed that he might obtain the oblivion of all former vain knowledge, which might hinder his happiness in the knowledge of Christ. Hear also the apostle, "Yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my lord!" [Philip. 3.8](#).

Be not discouraged with the seeming impossibility of attaining a sufficient measure of knowledge. He who taught old Nicodemus, will teach you. *Industry* and *resolution* will facilitate your achievement. You must be convinced, that ignorance will never excuse those who have the means of knowledge; that the God does not require the same degree of knowledge from all Christians, but does allow for men's education, abilities and employments. Yet he does indispensably require, so much as is necessary to the forming of the new creature, to the necessary doctrines and duties of Christian religion; that neither the spiritually dumb, nor the blind, can enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

Awake therefore you that sleep, out of your stupid negligence, and Christ will give you light. Redeem some time daily for *reading, meditation* and *prayer*. "If you cry after knowledge, an

and lift up your voice for understanding — if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasure — then you shall understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God!" [Proverbs 2.3-5](#).

There are variety of books which handle the fundamentals of religion, some more briefly, some more largely. Take not upon trust, the doctrines of your salvation, but endeavor to be able to give a reason of the hope that is in you. You should be able to *instruct* others — do not be children in knowledge yourselves. And you that are competently knowing, should thirst for more, and grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, [2 Peter 3.18](#). This is the fittest covetousness for an old man or woman — this will make you like unto God, honored by wise men, and useful to all men.

Section 2.

The second grace proper for old-age, is **FAITH**, whereby the soul embraces Jesus Christ as mediator, and also relies upon the promises of God for all good things needful. Now although this grace be needful for every Christian, insomuch as he is said to live by faith — a life unknown to all unregenerate men — yet it is or should be *the particular jewel of old-age*. For as God's word and ordinances are the usual means to work faith, and herein young and old stand upon the same level, they have equal capacity for the attaining of it. So longer experience is a proper help for the strengthening and increasing of faith. So that as reason is much improved by learning — so is faith by use and experience, hereby faith is advanced into assurance. Thus Abraham is represented, [Romans 4.19, 20](#), "Not weak in faith, when he was a hundred years old, and so staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief." The his years rendered the promise very unlikely — yet those years had taught him, that the performance would be certain, and so being strong in faith, he gave glory to God. As they have heard — so have they seen it in their experience; and what they have often seen — they may well believe.

They have seen the wicked in great power, flourishing like a green bay-tree — and yet suddenly they have passed away. Therefore they are not so startled at the prosperity of ungodly men, as younger people may be. They have also seen the righteousness of the upright brought forth as the light; and so believe that it shall be well with the righteous, and it shall go ill with the wicked at length. They themselves have been in outward straits and dangers, and then wonderfully preserved and provided for — and does not this strengthen their faith?

And then in case of spiritual needs and troubles, when their spirit is overwhelmed, the old-man can say with Asaph, [Psalm 77.5](#), "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times," and so prop up their spirits in their greatest dejections.

If you that are old lack faith — it is a great shame for you. For you have been so often told and assured of the veracity, the power, and the goodness of God; and then you have so often seen these properties of his exemplified to others, and to yourselves, so many wonders of providence done in your remembrance — that you yourselves must be the greatest wonder, in case you do not believe and trust him.

When your soul is cast down, you may do as David did, *remember God* from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar: that is, you may review the help and comfort which you have had in this and the other place of your pilgrimage, and so hope still in God, that the help of his countenance will be the health of yours. [Psalm 42. 5, 6, 11.](#)

Learn therefore this *life of faith*; and endeavor as you grow weaker in body, to grow stronger in faith.

1. For **temporal** mercies it concerns you to live by faith. You may be tempted to fear poverty in your old-age. Here's now occasion for faith, whereby you are firmly to believe either that you shall lack nothing, or else no good thing, [Psalm 34.9,10.](#) That the Lord will either supply your needs, or enrich you by your needs. It was a memorable saying of an aged pious woman, "I have made many a meal upon the promises, when I have lacked bread." And Christ has said it, that man lives not by bread only, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God, [Matthew 4.4.](#)

So that a child of God shall never lack a livelihood, so long as there is a promise in the book of God. But then he had need of faith, and the stronger the faith, the more cheerful life he lives. For as by it he enjoys God in all things in case of plenty, so by it he enjoys all things in God in case of need.

2. For **spiritual** blessings it concerns you to live by faith, namely, for pardon, grace and comfort. You have been long conversant with the promises of God for these mercies, and have had often experiences of the grace and mercy of God unto you; and so may conclude with the Psalmist, the Lord has been mindful of us, he will bless us, [Psalm 115.12.](#) He who for gave you ten thousand talents upon your first repentance — will readily forgive an hundred pence upon your second. And he who gave you good desires, when you were not worth a good thought — will surely give you your desires of more grace, when your hearts are now fully set upon it. And he who spoke peace to your consciences, when you were younger — will restore unto you the joy of his salvation, as soon and as far as is good for you, now that you are older; though at present you walk in darkness, and see no light. For an old servant, he never utterly casts off.

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which has great recompense of reward. The dimmer the eye of your sense grows — the clearer let the eye of your faith become; by which you may see, as Moses did on mount Pisgah, into the promised land, and may comfort your hearts with the foretastes of glory. By this faith it was that Isaac when he was blind through age, blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By this faith Jacob when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshiped leaning upon the top of his staff, [Hebrews 11.20, 21.](#) In short, nothing is more needful for the old person, whose limbs are weak, eye-sight weak, memory, all weak — than a strong and lively faith.

And this you must labor for by earnest and frequent prayer; for every one that asks, receive; and he who seeks, finds. Cry out therefore with the apostles, [Luke 17.5,](#) "Lord increase our faith!" And when you find it waver, then cry again with the man, [Mark 9.24,](#) "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!"

We will relieve a poor old man, when we pass by the younger; and he who has planted that compassion in us — has much more in himself.

And then consider often of the truth and faithfulness of God, whose *word* is as sure as *deed*. For all his promises are yes and amen in Christ. Which *promises* you ought to store up and study; instead of counting over your money or surveying your bonds. Meditate on the rich and precious promises of God, and they will beget new blood and spirits in your souls, so that at your youth will be renewed as the eagles.

And as long as you are able, attend upon the preaching of God's word; for faith by hearing. The same texts, the same truths, the same promises which you have often read and heard, will still afford new strength to your faith and hope, as long as you live.

Section 3.

The third grace proper for old-age is **WISDOM**: which we take here in the largest and yet truest sense, not once regarding that mere worldly wisdom, which is not only earthly and selfish, but wicked and devilish — that is only skilled in getting an estate by hook or crook, and in keeping it without respect to God or our neighbor. No, this cannot in any tolerable sense be called wisdom. *It's absolute folly to lose, yes to venture a soul — for what may be utterly lost tomorrow.* But I speak here of true wisdom in its latitude, teaching men to live safely and comfortably here, and happily hereafter; as it fixes upon a right end, and chooses and uses the proper means to attain it. This grace directs a man to make choice of God for his happiness, and then diligently to apply himself to know, love, serve and enjoy him. This also guides him in all his employments in this world, to attempt nothing but what is possible, honest and useful; to choose the fittest means for the attainment of his just ends; to place his words and actions in their proper circumstances; always to take the *safest* way to his desires; and in short to order his affairs with discretion.

And this is the crown of old-age: every aged person is or should be truly wise; multitude of years should teach wisdom, [Job 32.7](#). The crown of youth is their *strength* — but the glory of old-age is their *wisdom*. And wisdom is better than strength, [Ecclesiastes 9.16](#). Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten mighty men in a city, [Ecclesiastes 7.19](#). By wisdom the aged are better enabled to discharge their duties to husbands, wives, children, servants and neighbors, than ordinarily younger people are. Wisdom enables the aged to dispose spiritual and secular duties in their right places — and to temper and guide that zeal and affection, which without it is foolish and dangerous. The rashness of young counsels is evident in the case of Rehoboam, [1 Kings 12](#), who following the proud and fierce advice of his young courtiers, lost ten tribes in one day, which the sage counsel of his old counselors had certainly preserved. And it is known, how often the commonwealths of Athens and Rome, were endangered by the folly and rashness of young heads, had they not been ballasted by the sober and wary interposition of graver people.

Younger people may excel in feats of activity, but the old do exceed in the skill of managing. Young people indeed may sooner apprehend a business, and may more strenuously execute it; but the old man by comparing and weighing all circumstances can make a better jud

gment of it, and so give better directions for the execution of it. As it is said of young musicians, that they may sing tunes better, but the old musician can set lessons better. The aged have not only *read* and *heard*, but also *seen* such variety of actions and events, that it renders them much more circumspect and wary in their courses.

And the wisest of men concludes, That wisdom is better than weapons of war [Ecclesiastes 9.18](#). And this is rarely found in novices, they are too young to look backward, and too rash to look forward. But the aged person being taught by things *past*, has a clearer sight of things *present* — and consequently does more cautiously provide for things *future*. Words and shows and appearances do more easily deceive the young; but the old see through all such *varnish*, and penetrate into the inside of men and things.

Miserable is that old-age, says one, that has nothing grave besides gray hairs and wrinkles. But any man that has made but common observations of what has fallen out, with their causes and effects, during the space of forty or fifty years, must needs understand better — what, and how, and when a thing is to be done, than those who have neither read, seen, or observed half so much. Hence that expression, [Psalm 119.100](#), "I understand more than the ancients;" which implies, that the ancients have ordinarily the greatest stock of understanding.

Hereupon Themistocles is said to be sorry to die, when he began to be wise, being then a hundred and seven years of age. This is the common fate of mankind, to die even just then when they begin to know how to live; and therefore no man should defer his careful endeavors to get wisdom, since there is a price put into our hands for that end, if we have but an heart to it, [Proverbs 17.16](#).

Let it therefore be your study to get and increase in all wisdom — chiefly for the attaining everlasting happiness. For unto man God has said, "behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, that is understanding," [Job 28.28](#). For as it would be folly to plan a fine house, and then set it upon a quick-sand; so doubtless all the policy of worldly men to get riches and a name, if they do not truly fear God — is but like an house upon the sand, or a spiders web in the ceiling, which will quickly vanish.

It is true wisdom for every man to chose the chief good for his ultimate end, and then to take God's counsel how to obtain it.

"I have seen five princes," (said Mr. Mason, on his death-bed,) "and been privy counselor to four. I have seen the most remarkable observables in foreign parts, and been present at most state-transactions for the past thirty years, and I have learned this, after so many years experience, that seriousness is the greatest wisdom, temperance the best medicine, and that a good conscience is the best estate. Yes, I would change the whole life I have lived in the palace — for one hours enjoyment of God in the chapel."

O that all young people would believe and consider this sage observation of a dying man! For or judge your own selves, is it wisdom to do that daily and wittingly — which must be undone? To strive for the end, *happiness* — and yet neglect the means, *holiness*? To maintain strong hope — and yet to have no ground for it? To chose the worst of evils — before the chief good? To live in sin, and yet expect to die in Christ? To defer the greatest business — until

we have the least fit time and strength to do it? And yet this is the wisdom that passes current in this world.

You should endeavor also to store your minds with *prudence to order your affairs aright*. There is no time, or place, or business, but there is use for this — such constant use for justice, fortitude, or many other virtues. This will render your gray hairs really lovely. "I had rather," says Nazianzen, "have one drop of prudence, than a sea of worldly riches."

Integrity and *wisdom* are good companions. A *serpents eye* is a singular ornament in a *doves head*. Hereby you will be useful to yourselves, helpful to others, beneficial to all. "Happy is that city," said Plutarch, "where the counsels of old men, and the arms of young men concur for the common good." Your time will be rightly divided, your household affairs calmly and constantly managed, and your mind freed from the hurry and perturbation, which fills the lives of other men.

"Then I saw that wisdom, excels folly; as far as light excels darkness," [Ecclesiastes 2.13](#). The first direction which the apostle gives to old men, is, [Titus 2.2](#), "That the aged men be sober, grave" — the infirmity of your bodies should promote the sobriety of your minds. *Folly is no where less excusable, than in an aged person.*

You should therefore pray incessantly unto God for this blessing. [Jam. 1.5](#), "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him *ask* of God, and it shall be given him."

And improve your *thinking* time; for *meditation* enriches the mind, and helps us to draw such inferences from what we have read and heard and seen, which will serve for rules of practice in every case.

And especially converse with the *Scripture*, which will make you wise to salvation. Surely there is no book under Heaven, which affords such rules of true prudence for the conduct of our lives, as the book of Proverbs. And still remember this, that the more wisdom, the more like God you will be, and the more useful to men. And certainly *usefulness* is next to the *fruition of God* — the greatest happiness of man upon earth.

Section 4.

The fourth grace that old-age should excel in, is **PATIENCE**. Which is a quiet and cheerful undergoing whatever difficulties, or troubles, are incident to us in this world. It extends indeed, in its largest sense, to comprehend, both waiting God's time for the blessings we need — and bearing whatever crosses he inflicts upon us, either by his own hand or by others. Patience is when we neither sink by despondency, nor rage by inordinate passion either at the stone, or at the hand that throws it. And this not by virtue of a stoic insensibleness, or of some moral arguments which might quiet some of the philosophers under pain or losses, but could never do it under disgrace. But that patience which is directed by the example of Christ, and strengthened by the grace and spirit of Christ — keeps the soul from secret repining, or open murmuring at any event, and saves from repining at present, and from ruin hereafter.

And herein old-age does or should excel. They have met with many troubles in their pilgrim age; and the Scripture tells us, that tribulation works patience, [Romans 5.3](#). Consequently, *the more troubles, the greater patience*. They have been taught to wait for some mercies which they have desired, for many years; and so have been taught patience, which when they have well learned, then the mercy has been conferred. They have been tried with *many afflictions from the hand of God*, either upon their *BODIES*, as sickness, pain, etc. sometimes by acute, sometimes by chronic distempers; and these have exercised and taught them patience. Or upon their *SOULS*, as desertions, or other impressions of divine displeasure, and thereby have learned quietly to wait for the salvation of God. Or by the *death* of their dear family, or children, or friends; all which, by the blessing of God concurring therewith, have like continual burdens on the shoulder, inured and strengthened them in this excellent grace.

The aged person has also had many *provocations, losses*, and injuries from men — which have both tried and tamed his mettle. He has been either uncomfortably matched in *marriage*, whereby his patience has been put to it every day; or crossed in his *children*, or fixed near some disturbing *neighbor*, or harassed by a costly and tedious suit of law — any of which have forced him to exercise this grace. Or else he has been smitten in his reputation, or maimed by some great loss or disappointment in his estate, where he has had no remedy but patience.

I know these things do too often work the wrong way, that is, they produce fretfulness, anger, melancholy, and other dismal effects. But in the upright man, they humble his spirits, they break the pride, security and stubbornness of his soul, and make him by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honor and immortality — and so fit him for eternal life.

And the aged do or should exceed those who are young herein. For the tender shoulders of the young cannot well bear these burdens. As Ephraim once — so they are like bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke, which fret and fume, and are galled under the aforesaid trials. Though the Holy Spirit has told us, that it is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth — yet commonly it is some tract of time, before this yoke is quietly and evenly carried.

Old age does most perfectly teach this lesson. He who in his youth would quickly have answered the slander with his fists — will then answer it with a smile. The tears which in our youth we spent upon any trivial occasion — we then reserve for better purposes. We come to learn to wait God's timing for the mercies we desire. Time and trials have taught the old-man to digest hard words, and hard things — rather than to fight it out. Good David could better bear Shimei's curse when he was grown into years — than Nabal's uncharitableness, when he was younger. Now it was nothing but kill and slay, at least every male in Nabal's house; but afterwards, "Let him curse, because the Lord has said unto him, curse David." [2 Samuel 16.10](#).

And those *disciples* of our savior, who in their younger years would have had fire sent from Heaven, to revenge the incivility of the Samaritans — they in their riper years had learned, when reviled to bless, when persecuted to suffer it; and to bear all indignities not only with much patience, [2 Corinthians 6.4](#) — but with all patience, [2 Corinthians 12.12](#). Such is the effect of years and experience by the blessing of God.

And you that are in older years must be inexcusable, if you are defective in this grace, because you have been for a long time scholars under a patient master, who has left us an example, that we should follow his steps; who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, [1 Peter 2.21, 23](#).

You have also read and heard many convincing discourses upon this subject; you have seen the folly and madness of impatience, and of revenge in others. And you have had so many crosses of your own, that it is the most absurd thing imaginable for you to be destitute hereof. No great wonder to see an unbroken colt to buck at the spur or whip; but if the old tried beast do so, he is better fed than taught. No, *you should be patterns of patience to others*.

We may well feel things as mortal men, (says Hooper) yet overcome them as Christian men. Outward afflictions may prick us — but yet they should not pierce us. The old *soldier* will not fret at hard marches, hard weather, hard usage — for he has been beaten to them us. The old *mariner* repines not at the boisterous winds, or the threatening waves. "You are too particular my brother," says Hierom, "if you grudge to be *tried* below — yet expect to be *crowned* above."

Labor therefore to get and increase your stock of patience. Let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing, [James 1.4](#). This grace of patience you will daily *need*, and daily *use*. "For we have need of patience, that after we have done the will of God, we may receive the promise," [Hebrews 10.36](#). Patience will be like a buckler, to save you harmless from the evil of affliction. Though you have faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance — yet you must add unto these patience, that you may never fall, [2 Peter 1.6](#).

Patience will not only bridle your tongue, but quiet your mind, and keep you composed, in possession of your own souls — when dispossessed of all other things. For an impatient man, while he is afflicted by another, even then punishes himself, and so is his own greatest tormenter. Alas! You must still expect a succession of troubles, and unexpected crosses, until your pilgrimage through this wilderness is finished. And if you escape these from abroad — yet you may find occasion enough for your patience with your own children and friends, and perhaps with nearer relations. And though you should miss of these — yet *your own distempers* will try your patience; when you can neither eat your food, nor live without it; neither sleep with refreshment, nor lie awake with ease; neither endure company, nor be contented alone; when you will be weary of every place, of every posture, and without patience, weary of yourself. And therefore it greatly concerns you to store yourselves with this needful, this useful grace.

And to that end, inure yourselves unto it by degrees: strive to digest lesser wrongs, provocations and losses — which will prepare you to be quiet under greater wrongs, provocations and losses. While others are endeavoring to out-wit, or out-power their adversaries — you be laboring to overcome your own resentments, to conquer yourselves. And then set before you that *mirror of patience*, the Lord Jesus Christ, who always had right and power on his side — and yet patiently bore the anger of God, the reproaches of men, and the rage of devils.

It is reported of that noble Elziarius, that he would set himself to think of the injuries done to Christ, until he was fully contented to bear his own. For alas, each of us deserves infinitely greater trials — and yet we suffer infinitely less than he did. And this prevailed with the apostle James and other martyrs to express such patience at their sufferings, that even that convinced some of their very persecutors to declare themselves Christians.

Above all, *pray* earnestly to him who is called, "The God of patience," for a sufficient portion of this grace. No philosophical arguments will compose the mind like the grace of God. I have read of a learned man, that being on his deathbed, one of his friends told him that it was needless to suggest arguments of patience to him that was so well read in the writings of the Stoics; thereupon, instead of an answer, turns him to God, saying, "Lord Jesus bestow upon me Christian patience!" So will your burdens be tolerable, your life amiable, your relations comfortable, your mind calm, and your body easy.

Section V.

The fifth excellency that does or should adorn old-age, is **STEADFASTNESS** — which is a fixed settledness of the soul, influencing our life and actions. This is opposed to that levity and inconstancy which is incident to young people. The aged man is steadfast in his *mind* and *judgment*, and not easily unhinged; he is fixed in his *will*, and not easily charmed or drawn from his well-chosen objects. In respect of God and the things of religion, a person in older years is or should be like a rock, immoveable, not like the ship that is tossed to and fro. *Having considered and weighed their principles* — no worldly consideration, no plausible harangues, no loss or punishment will induce them easily to alter their principles.

In respect of others, their *friendship* being grounded upon a firm bottom is constant, and they have learned to overlook ordinary failings, and to put the best sense on the words and actions of a friend.

So likewise their *conjugal* love, though the frothy fondness of it is worn off — yet the strength and substance of it is unquestionable and unalterable.

And then as to *themselves*, their passions are by long endeavors so moderated and regulated, that as their temper is far more even and uniform, than once it was; so also their actions and course of life are more steady and consistent, than in the days of their youthful vanity.

I will not contend that all aged people excel in this steadfastness, especially when senility invades old-age; but that *generally* it is so — and universally it should be so; and particular exceptions do always confirm general conclusions. Nor do I conclude that all young people are vain and inconstant, but it is too manifest to be denied, that childhood and youth have us usually the large sails — but old-age has the solid ballast, and therefore does sail more st

easily and more safely. Every wind will make impression on the young tree, but the *old oak* stands firm against the storms. The young horse may go more nimbly — but the tried beast goes more steadfastly and surely. Youth is the unsettled age — the *head* unsettled, the *heart* unsettled, and the *life* unsettled.

The wise man exhorts to remember our creator in the days of our youth, [Ecclesiastes 12.1](#). This seems to imply, that youth is a time wherein people are undetermined — they yet have their religion, their relations, their vocation to choose. But when a man is crowned with years, then he is in a settled estate: settled in judgment, settled in his purposes, settled in his practice, and commonly settled in his comfort.

When the apostle Paul was near the end of his life, then he could say, "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day!" [2 Timothy 1:12](#)

The constitution and temper of the aged disposes them unto steadfastness. Their expectant and lively days are done. They have seen the world, the vanities and varieties of men and things, of opinions and practices; they have tried all things, and therefore are likelier to hold fast that which is *good*.

And as there is a wearisomness of the body, so there is a certain weariness of the mind, which makes it desirous to be fixed on eternity, and to long for everlasting rest. And having often heard, read and pondered the things of religion, and also tasted the real comfort and sweetness in them — they are not easily either flattered, or frighted out of them.

Their approach to death *adds* also to their steadfastness — why should they through fear recede from their principles, that in a short time must die of necessity? He that cannot lose many years, needs not fear other losses; and so may well be steadfast and unmovable in his duty.

Let it be your care therefore to be rooted and grounded in the principle and practice of **true piety**. Do not be like children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. It is an arrant shame for you that are old, to have your religion to choose, or to change it every month. It is not for you to follow fashions in religion — but you should be rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving, [Colossians 2.7](#).

Stability should be your peculiar honor. Young people may have a land-flood of devotion and zeal — but you ought to pass like a still and constant river; you should be constant in prayer, in watchfulness, in charity, etc. While the goodness of many young people is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew that passes away — your path should be as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day.

As the the motion of natural bodies, when they approach their center, is more swift — so your motions should be more steady. It is impossible to be upright without courage. That's th

the happy man, either young or old, who is like Athanasius — of a temperament and character to attract love and respect; and yet of principles and resolutions to withstand, in a good cause, all opposition.

The weakness of your limbs and senses, should be compensated with stability and strength in your spirit. The aged mind alone grows young, "We faint not," says the apostle, "but as the outward man perishes — so should your inward man be renewed day by day!" [2 Corinthians 4.16](#).

For this purpose, *you should weigh and examine your principles well*. Those of religion — by the rule of the Scriptures; those of human life — in the scales of reason. And having once well fixed them, alter them not upon every suggestion.

The manifest cause of most men's unsteadfastness, both in judgment and practice, is their rash embracing of those points that should have been well weighed at the first — for what they have swallowed down by wholesale, they will vomit up again by retail in time of trial. The observation is very true, "He who begins in doubts, will end in certainties; and he who begins in certainties, will end in doubts." Add to this, a suitable practice of your sound and honest principles. This will acquaint you with that comfort and sweetness, which will establish your mind in them more and more.

A rotten heart is apt to produce a giddy head; whereas righteousness both directs, and keeps him that is upright in the way, [Proverbs 11.5](#). All the abilities and learning in the world will not fix the head and heart, like *sincerity*. It is good that the heart is established with grace, [Hebrews 13.9](#). *Experience* in religion, will make you *steadfast* in religion.

And lastly, *pray earnestly unto God to make you steadfast*. See how emphatically the apostle Paul mentions this, [2 Thessalonians 2.17](#). "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even our father — establish you." For we are weak creatures, yes, knowledge and grace are but creatures; but earnest prayer will engage the help and support of almighty God, who can and will establish, strengthen, settle you, [1 Peter 5.10](#).

Section VI.

The sixth grace wherein old-age does or should excel, is **TEMPERANCE** and **SOBRIETY**. That's the injunction of the apostle, [Titus 2.2](#), "That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate." By this temperance, I understand that fruit of the Spirit which bridles our inordinate affections in all outward mercies; or more strictly, which observes a right balance in desiring, and using the pleasures of the senses. And so in respect of food, it is *temperance*; in respect of drinking, it is *sobriety*; in respect of other carnal pleasures, *chastity*. All these the temperate man curbs by holy reason, and by holy force. Hereby he stills the inordinate desire, and restrains the use within its due bounds. He *mortifies* the unlawful pleasures and recreations of the body, and *moderates* the lawful pleasures and recreations of the body. He neither absolutely refuses them, nor inordinately desires or uses them.

Now this grace is very *proper*, though not *peculiar* to old-age. They especially do or ought to excel herein.

Commonly the aged are by God's grace, weaned from the excesses of youth. The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life have, too usually, their distinct seasons of rule, or at least molestation in the soul of man. And the first having had its course in the time of youth, its reign is expired, and the aged must now combat the other two as well as he can.

The decays of natural strength are great helps to the old-man's temperance; he cannot, if he would, eat and drink, and carry out his lust as heretofore. And although this inability does not make him a temperate man — yet hereby *the discontinuance of the acts weaken the habit*. His contentedness therewith, and his hearty thankfulness for this reformation may be accounted real temperance — especially when he can reflect upon his former disorders with grief, hatred and shame.

Now they find by experience, that a man may live more comfortably, and healthfully with less food, less drink, and less sleep, than young people indulge themselves with — and other carnal pleasures are indifferent to them, because desire fails them — and it is much better and easier to lack desires, than to fulfill them; as it is far better not to itch, than to have the pleasure of scratching where it itches.

But now the pious old person has really crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts; his sins did not leave him — but he has left them. They have not heard and read the Scripture so long in vain, which everywhere condemns all excess and riot, all chambering and wantonness — and obliges all Christians to deny themselves, and to pluck out the right eye that does offend them. They have found by experience that as true virtue, so true *satisfaction* is only found in *moderation*; and that all extremes are offensive both to the mind and body. I said of laughter, it is mad, and of mirth, what does it? "Laughter is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?" [Ecclesiastes 2.2](#). This was the verdict which wise Solomon brought in his old-age, when he had not withheld his heart from any joy, etc. yet then he concludes, "All was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun," [Ecclesiastes 2.10](#).

Besides, those who have lived long, have seen the woeful effects of drunkenness, immorality, and luxury — how many *bodies* they have destroyed, how many *estates* and *families* they have ruined, and what small pity the miserable spend-thrift meets with in those people and places, where he has consumed his substance. These and such like observations have contributed to the aged man's sobriety, they have been pillars of salt to him.

Any profligacy in a person of many years, as it is most *pernicious* to him, so it is *intolerable* to him. It makes them the objects both of laughter, scorn, and detestation! Every excess in them debilitates their nature, sullies their reputation, and shakes their grace exceedingly. When aged people fall, they fall with a great weight, and are crushed more than younger people, and perhaps they have more difficulty to rise again. Far more excuses are found for the lapses of young people — than can be pretended by the aged; their faults are crimes, and their crimes are prodigies. As their *diseases* — so their exorbitances are far more dangerous.

Let it therefore be your constant care to keep yourselves within the bounds of temperance and sobriety. And that both for others sakes, and for your own. You should be *examples* — not *stumbling blocks* to younger people. Your vices may propagate, when your age is beyond

d it; and those who are eye or ear-witnesses of your follies, may practice them. And although you may recover by true repentance — yet they may stumble because of your example, and fall and never rise again. Entail not a curse upon your posterity, do not nourish in them that natural depravity, which in equity you ought rather to cure.

And for your own sake be sober, be vigilant; for you are upon the confines of the everlasting world — a world wherein all sensual enjoyments will be forever out of date. Endeavor to go off the stage without a blemish.

"God," said one, "is serious in his law, Jesus Christ was serious in his death, the Holy Spirit is serious in his dealing with our souls, all in Heaven and Hell are serious — and shall a man that has one foot in the grave, laugh and jest?"

Take warning by poor Noah, one hours drunkenness revealed that which six hundred years sobriety had concealed. If his inexperience did in any degree excuse him, you can make no such pretense. If you have any regard to the health and vigor of your bodies, to the quiet and welfare of your souls, to the pleasing and honoring of God — then bridle your appetite and check the pleasures of your senses.

In short, there is, as we observed before, no better way to spin out your lives, to make old-age pleasant, and death easy — than the exercise of sobriety. The instance of a learned and rich Italian is common, that with a sparing and orderly diet lived to a great age with little inconvenience. To deny a man's self — is the way to please himself at length. And by opposing the inordinate desires of the body, we contribute to the true happiness even of the body itself.

And here comes in the use and exercise of *mortification*, wherein the a wise man may make some steps — yet the work cannot be done without the assistance of God's Holy Spirit. "If you through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live," [Romans 8. 13](#). Implore therefore the aid of this good Spirit, who can make you mortally to hate that which you now do ardently love; and will pluck up the *roots* of that, whereof morality does only shave the hair. Set the spectacle of *death* often before you, and of that *endless estate* to which you are such near neighbors — and think how unsuitable a *vain life* is, to a *serious death*. Be much in prayer, and if need be add fasting thereunto, that your *moderation* may be known unto all men, seeing undoubtedly to aged people, the Lord is at hand.

Section 7.

The seventh grace proper for old-age, is charity or **LOVE**. Not that sensual or carnal love which is common to youth, and which has long since dropped off, like leaves, in the autumn of their age; but that grace which disposes . . . the *heart* to think the best, the *tongue* to speak the best, and the *whole man* to promote the welfare of others.

The seat or chief mansion of this grace, is the heart, which being filled with love, it is diffused every way, and the whole man is tinctured with it. It obliges a man to *think* the best of every man. Love thinks no evil, believes all things, hopes all things, bears all things. By this,

we are ready to account the certain good things in others better than they are; the certain evils in others, less than they are; the good that is but doubtful in others, certain; and doubtful evils, none. And it rests not in opinion, but works by desire, whereby *the heart sincerely desires the temporal, spiritual and eternal good of all men.*

Neither does it rest there, but shows itself in endeavor, and that both by word and deed; speaking to them, of them, for them to God and man what may conduce thereunto. In their lips, is the law of kindness. Love is not proud, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, is not easily provoked, [1 Corinthians 13.5](#). Neither will *words alone* satisfy it, but does actually help and cheerfully support everybody, as their occasion requires, and his own ability extends.

And in this grace of love, does every godly old man and woman excel. This was the eminent grace of the evangelist *John* in his old-age, for he lived longer than any of the apostles; and his swanlike song still was love, as is evident in all his epistles. Yes, some church historians affirm, that when he could go no longer by reason of his age into the Christian assemblies; yet he was constant to be led or carried there, where the substance of what he was able to say, was: "*Little children, love one another.*"

And you may find, how tender was *Paul* the aged in his charity to Onesimus, [Philemon 9](#), "Being such a one as Paul the aged, for loves sake I beseech you for my son Onesimus."

And this spirit continued in the aged Christians in the primitive times, who loved as brethren, and were ready to die for one another. "We who one hated one another," says Justin Martyr, "now live happily together, and pray for our enemies."

In all ages, as men have increased in piety, they have increased in charity, and come to relent of their rigor and sharpness. It was age, experience and consideration, as well as a prison — that melted Ridley to help his brother Hooper in this manner, "However in some by matters and circumstances of religion, your wisdom and my simplicity has a little jarred — yet now I sincerely love and embrace you."

You know Rehoboam's *old* counselors were for mildness — when the *young* counselors were stern and furious. It's true, the natural tempers or painful distempers, may incline some aged people to too much acrimony; yet all aged people that are considerate, have taken more degrees in charity, than young people have. It was an *old man in Gibeah* that had more of this grace, than all the city besides, [Judges 19.16](#).

For besides the advantage they have had of God's holy ordinances, the scope whereof is to increase our faith and love; they have found by *experience*, that the life and soul of religion lies not in those matters that have caused the greatest noise in the world. Love considers that at every difference in religion makes not a different religion — so that wherever they see anything of Christ, these they love. *Their consciousness of their own mistakes, and of their own imperfections — has forced them to more charitable thoughts of others.* They have observed, that true grace has lived in the midst of great infirmities. Yes, they have found this *flower* in divers people, where they thought there had been nothing but weeds. Being conversant most at home in their *own souls*, they have in their long experience discovered so much *vanity* and *iniquity* there, that they are very charitable judges of all other people. Their char

ity covers a multitude of sins. In short, their age and afflictions have so happily humbled them, that they are ready to esteem every one better than themselves; and so they are far from that *uncharitable censoriousness*, which tears men's names in pieces, and keeps up a continual civil war among mankind.

And then for other acts of charity — who should be more ready to give a part, than those who know they must shortly leave the world so soon? Who should be good in his stewardship — but he who is sure he must shortly be out of it?

But the noblest charity is that which respects the *soul*, which consists in counseling, persuading, reproving and praying for others. And old-age is evidently qualified for these above the young. Their wisdom and authority gives them a great advantage herein: and they have found by experience, that sometimes a word of *good counsel* or *charitable reproof* fitly spoken, has been like apples of gold.

And then for *prayer*, it is observed that the charity of young people therein, does begin and end at themselves; whereas the prayers of the aged are much employed for the good of others. Few children pray for their parents — as the parents pray for their children. Yes, they have learned to love and pray for their *enemies* — as well as for their friends; and for the ungodly — as well as for the godly. The poorest old man or woman may be rich, in these acts of charity.

"Therefore as you abound in everything, in faith, in utterance and knowledge, see that you abound in this grace of love also." It is the apostles exhortation, [2 Corinthians 8.7](#).

We use to say, that in winter the natural heat retreats inward, and there resides about the vital parts. You who are in the winter quarter of your life, let this warm grace of love dwell richly in your hearts, and then it will influence all your words and actions. It is the image of God — for God is love; it is the fulfilling of the law — and it is the great command of the gospel; and the you have knowledge, faith, wisdom, riches, etc. Yet if you have not love, you are nothing.

You are soon to leave the world — now is your time to exercise this grace. In the glorious world where you are going, there will be
no infirmities to cover,
no poor to relieve,
no injuries to forgive,
no ignorant people to instruct,
no miserable creature to pray for.

So you have but a short time for these employments. Yes, perhaps you are reprieved all this while for these services; and to be useful in these and such like ways is the greatest happiness on earth, it is the next step to eternal glory.

Yes, nothing should make an old person content to live out of Heaven with such a body of sin about him — but only that they may do God and man that service, which cannot be done in heaven.

And for the obtaining this sweet grace, the Scripture tells us, that love is a fruit of the spirit, [Galatians 5.22](#). And there it is ranked in the first place — it must be sought then in the word of God, which is the vehicle of the Spirit; where, it being carefully read and heard, we shall find an account of the infinite love of God to us, and of the stupendous love of Christ. There we shall discern how nearly we are related to all men, especially to all Christians, and how unnatural it is for one hand to be unkind to the other. And in short, we shall there find, that love is still the character of godly men — and hatred and uncharitableness of the evil men. And you must beg this grace of God, that the Spirit of love would plant this grace of love in your hearts. You will feel your hearts warming as you are praying, and the Lord will fill you with this charity which is the bond of perfectness.

And so I am done with the *virtues* and *excellencies* of old-age. Whereby you may perceive that all aged people are not to be cast away. But as old *wood* is best to burn, old *wine* best to drink, old *authors* best to read, and old *friends* best to trust — so aged people, if they have improved their time aright, are good for something; yes are eminently good . . .

for their *knowledge*,
for their *faith*,
for their *wisdom*,
for their *patience*,
for their *steadfastness*,
for their *temperance*,
and for their *charity*.

And so much for the fourth point concerning old-age, namely, the graces most proper for it.

Chapter 5. The INCONVENIENCES and DISADVANTAGES of old-age.

I am come now in the fifth place to examine the *inconveniences* and *disadvantages* of old-age; adding withal somewhat towards the *mitigation* thereof, as I pass along. Some here set themselves with immoderate vehemence to cry down old-age, and to load it with such intolerable miseries, as might affright one. And to this purpose they muster all the evils which are either the *effect* of men's vices, or other inseparable *outcomes* of their age, and put all these upon its score to inflame the reckoning — insomuch that some of the old philosophers took upon them to quarrel with providence for giving man life, and thereby involving him in a continual state of misery. And all this, partly out of their ignorance of man's *primitive happiness* and *woeful fall* — and partly out of their dim-sightedness about his *endless felicity* — about all which material points they lived in great uncertainty.

Others on the contrary have been ready so to mince the matter, as if there were nothing in old-age but what is desirable — guilding its hairs and smoothing all its wrinkles; as if the spiritual advantages annihilated the physical burdens. The truth dwells, as I conceive, between these extremes. It must be granted, that as the *dregs* of the purest wines are left in the bottom — so old-age has many inconveniences peculiar to it; for which cause those days are called evil days, wherein the man has no pleasure, or with which he is greatly displeased, [Ecclesiastes 12.1](#).

But yet the same old-age has *divers privileges* to balance them; and their pressures are not properly miseries, because there is abundance of comfort, and benefit, which mitigate the m.

We have an elegant description of many of them in that twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes, ver s. 2, 3, etc.

When the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars will be darkened — that is, all outward comfort or prosperity, whether by day or by night will be eclipsed and withdrawn from us.

And the clouds will return after the rain — that is, one bodily distemper and outward trouble will successively follow another.

Then will *the keepers of the house tremble* — that is, the arms and hands which defend the body, will by reason of their cold and dry temper, shake and quiver.

And the *strong men will bow themselves* — that is, the thighs and legs, which have strongly born up the structure of the body, will be weak, and need the support of a staff to assist them.

And the grinders will cease because they are few — that is, the teeth which chew and grind our food, will break, rot, and fall out, so that being reduced to a few, they will be unable to do their office.

And those who look out of the windows will be darkened — that is, the eye-sight will fail, the organs of the eye, through which, as through a window, the soul looks out, being dried up and weakened.

And the doors shall be shut in the streets — that is, the lips and mouth will be disabled from speaking, or eating.

When the sound of the grinding is low — that is, digestion which is furthered by chewing, etc. will be obstructed.

And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird — that is, our sleep will be so shallow, that the least noise will awake us, and so short, that it will come before the cock-crowing.

And all the daughters of music shall be brought low — that is, our ears will grow dull, so that as we cannot hear — we care not for the sweetest music.

Also they shall be afraid of that which is high — that is, we shall by reason of weariness, dizziness, or short-windednesses, be afraid of mounting up to high places, and attempting such high things, as in youth we adventured upon.

And fears shall be in the way — that is, we shall be afraid in our journeying, lest we dash our weak and weary foot against a stone.

And the almond-tree shall flourish — that is, our head will grow hoary, like the almond tree which soon ripens.

And the grasshopper shall be a burden — that is, the least weight shall load our infirm body; yes we being then enough like grasshoppers, will grow burdens to ourselves and others.

And desire shall fail — that is, our appetite to eat, and our desire to marriage-embraces will be cooled and cease by degrees.

At length the silver cord will be loosed — that is, the bone with its marrow, and the nerves and fibers thereunto belonging will be resolved and weakened.

And the golden bowl will be broken — that is, the vessel and membrane that contains the brain, which is aptly called golden, both for its color and value, will at last be shattered.

And the pitcher will be broken at the fountain — that is, the veins will cease from doing their office, at the right ventricle of the heart, which is the fountain of life, and so our blood stagnating we are soon extinguished.

And the wheel will be broken at the cistern — that is, the great artery which is knit to the left side of the heart, by which the blood is derived into the parts, ceases its action and the pulse with it, which are the immediate forerunners of death.

And then the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns unto God who gave it.

Thus you see man's body, like some intricate edifice, first battered by various storms, at length the roof and walls decay, and at last falls to the ground — but our blessed redeemer has provided for the inhabitant an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

And now let us more distinctly survey the *inconveniences* and *disadvantages* of old-age — the chief whereof are these following.

Section 1. First, the aged are DEPRIVED OF MANY PLEASURES. They cannot divert themselves by hunting, hawking, fishing: they can neither well ride abroad, nor walk about home. They are done with visits, and feasts, and music. All the recreations of sense, are generally tasteless to them. Yes, they have scarcely any pleasure in their food, and drink, and sleep — so that their condition seems to be sad and lamentable. And we have the substance of all this confessed by an old man himself, namely Barzillai, "I am eighty years old today, and I can no longer enjoy anything. Food and wine are no longer tasty, and I cannot hear the singers as they sing." [2 Samuel 19:35](#). These things will signify nothing to me; they have forsaken me, and I value them as little.

Here you have the verdict which Barzillai brings in the case. Yes instead of pleasure, a constant sadness takes place in their countenance without, and, as may be judged, in their hearts within. Sobs and sighs are the accent of their language, and their complaints are frequently mixed with tears. Their condition then must needs be miserable, when they have such constant heaviness within, and no recreation without to alleviate it. Company burdens them

— and solitariness saddens them. Yes they are reluctant that anybody should be merry about them — so that they seem to lead a dolorous life, and to be estranged from all manner of pleasure.

Now pleasure is the *life* of life — what is life without delight? Why do men toil to get estates — but for the pleasure they take in them? Why do others hunt for applause, and climb for honor — but to please their imagination and their humor? Even the scholar would leave of his books, if he had not delight in them. So that *pleasure acts all mankind, and rules the world*. Now those years are lamentable, wherein a man shall say, "I have no pleasure in them!" And this makes some aged people weary of their lives — they reckon that a life stripped of joy and comfort, is not worth the keeping.

Nevertheless, old-age may support itself very well under this inconvenience: inasmuch, as the pleasures they are deprived of, are in themselves and to their experience, dangerous enjoyments — for nothing is more apt to disorder and fully the soul, than carnal pleasure. These very recreations which may be harmless in themselves — yet too commonly lead to intemperance, to impurity, to quarrels, and other mischiefs. Now if a dish be ever so palatable — yet if there are but danger of *poison* in it — no wise man will meddle with it.

Therefore Cato congratulates himself that he was delivered from the *slavery of pleasure* — and concludes, that it is a singular privilege of old-age, that it frees us from that which is most pernicious in youth!

And whatever regard weak men may have to these vanities, the wisest among the very heathens have concluded, that there is no plague so deadly to man, as the pleasures of the body! And that it comes to pass through the depravity of our natures, whereby we run mad upon them; we exceed the limits, and miss the ends which should be observed in the using of them.

Indeed the greatest part of the pleasures aforesaid, do belong only to the brutal or carnal part of man, and consequently the lack of them little concerns the rational creature. For, as a late worthy author says, none can think God so unkind to his own image in human nature, as in dispensing felicity to assign the larger share to the beast. No, all these sensual pleasures are so distracting, or so transient — that the utmost fruition of them, cannot make a man happy — nor the lack of them miserable. And this is the more evident, in that the wisest men have found the greatest pleasure in refusing those pleasures. And as an epicure has eaten for his pleasure — so many an abstemious man has professed, that he has forborne for his pleasure also.

Again, as the aged person is deprived of these pleasures, so he is freed from any desires after them. As his sensual *delights* fail — so his *desires* to them fail also. As he has not the pleasure of *scratching*, so he is free from the trouble of *itching*, and what man ever complains of such a want? We are never molested by the lack of anything, which we do not desire.

Neither is old-age without its particular pleasures. Tully tells us of divers old-men, that diverted themselves with great delight in their *studies*. And for those who have any smattering of learning, there is no earthly pleasure comparable to that of penetrating into the works of

creation and *providence*, of observing the natures, causes, and effects of those things — the *surface* whereof only is known to younger people.

Furthermore, the Christian old person has an inexpressible pleasure in the reflection of a well-spent life; and upon the various preservations and deliverances which the Lord has given him out of many temptations and afflictions. They have also the solid comfort of seeing their posterity grow up in the endowments of mind, body or estate; and so of a generation after them to serve and honor God, while the world stands.

There are also several *honest recreations*, in which their years do not hinder them. And however, it can be no disparagement to them, if they can take as much pleasure in *reading* and *meditating* upon God's Word, as ever they did in any other worldly diversion whatever. This is certain, that *their pleasures are more pure, more sound, more strong, and more lasting — than the frothy and unsatisfactory pleasures of sense and sin, which are but for a season.*

Finally, sickness of *body* or trouble of *mind*, to both which the young are equally obnoxious as the old — are able to divorce the youngest people from all sensible pleasures, and to clothe their faces with sadness. So that this inconvenience must not be so appropriated to old-age, but that any age may partake thereof. Even Augustine tells us, that in his younger years, he had contracted such sadness upon his spirits upon occasion of his godly mother's death, that nothing could comfort him. He went into the bath, hoping for some refreshment thereby, but his sorrow met him when he came out again. *A thousand accidents* may fix such sorrow even upon young people, which all the pleasures in the world cannot remove.

And the the consideration of their own and others sins, and of the effects of them — do make them often sad. Yet there is both a secret comfort at the bottom of it, and a certain joy at the end of it; they know what belongs to the laughter of the soul, and have frequent tastes of the joy that is unspeakable.

Section 2. A second inconvenience and disadvantage which attends old-age, is that their STRENGTH and BEAUTY are decreased. Those *arms* and *hands* which once were able and useful for any employment — are now scarcely strong and steady enough to feed themselves. The *legs* and *thighs* that have carried them many a pleasant journey, yes, to many a holy exercise — are grown stiff and weak, and grudge to carry them upstairs to bed. Yes, that *back* which was the support of the whole building, and many a load that was piled upon it — begins to bow and bend, and can scarcely carry itself erect. Their abilities in general are quite enervated and spent, as if they were weary of their employment; so that there seems to be left little of a man, but his shape. According to the proverb, "He is old, and so is no-body."

Like some ruined palace, here was the stately porch, there the fair stair-case, the shape of a fair parlor below, and the shadow of a handsome chamber above. So here, the carcass of the man remains — but the *beauty* is changed into wrinkles, and the *strength* into weakness. They had a pleasant prospect in their youth, but their flesh has bid them farewell. Their roses and lillies are withered, and a pale duskishness has taken possession. Their strength a

nd beauty are buried both together — so that it was a saying among the Romans, "He is sixty, make away with him."

For when a man's *strength* is gone, he seems to be useless. He can neither *defend himself*, nor *help others*. He can neither fight in war, nor labor in peace. Whether he be in the shop or in the field — he is quickly weary. He who could run to sin — can now hardly creep to church. He that had strength to vanquish his adversary — has now scarce strength to wrestle with his cough. And the burden of his discourse is, "I have known the time, that I could have done this and that." Thus Milo that prodigious man of strength, when coming in his old-age to see them exercise in the Olympic games, is said to look down with tears on his own arms, and to cry, "Alas, these now are dead!"

Yet this *loss of strength* some aged people can better bear — than others can bear the *decay of their beauty*. O to be unattractive, withered, and deformed — vexes them at the heart. They cannot look upon themselves with patience — and they conclude, that when they are so hideous to themselves — they must be unacceptable to everybody else.

But yet neither of these inconveniences are chargeable upon old-age itself. For as Tully well observes — the defects of *strength*, whereof we are sensible, do rather proceed from the vices of our youth, than from the fault of old-age. An intemperate youth transmits a weak body unto the time of old-age, and then we lay all the blame on old age. Galen in one place tells us, about "the 28th year of my age, when I knew there was a certain way to preserve health, I followed the same all my life after, so that I was never sick but of an illness for a day, and that seldom," and thereby he was healthy and brisk at seventy years of age. And Valerius Corvinus was strong enough to be the sixth time consul, when he was an hundred years old. Whereas on the contrary — *a prodigal youth produces a loathsome age*. Any intemperance wastes the strength and beauty, more than years.

Neither is old-age alone subject to these evils. For one weeks sickness, to which youth is as liable as old-age, will ruin your strength and spoil your beauty, as much as twenty years time can do. How many are crippled in their youth? How commonly does the small-pox disfigure their beauty! David himself complains, [Psalm 102.23](#), "He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days." And he cries, "O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days!" So that these decays must not only be appropriated to old-age — as any age may be afflicted with them.

Neither is this loss so insupportable, if we consider the true nature and value of these mercies. They are but *bodily* blessings — they are not the endowments of the *soul*. Many brutes surpass the stoutest youth in strength; and many flowers surpass them in beauty. "Why should I," says Cato, "now more desire the strength of a young man — than I should, when young, desire the strength of a bull or lion?" There is the like absurdity in both these desires. Or as he says in another place, "We may as reasonably in our youth, call back the state of childhood — as in old-age to expect the strength and beauty of youth, which is past and gone!"

You have, if it is not your own fault, the privileges proper to your age, and according to the old observation, it is far better to lack the strength of Hercules, than the wisdom of Solomon.

Every age has its peculiar talent — and to have them in perfection is not to be expected upon earth. We should be thankful for the strength and features we have had, and bewail our abuse of them, and conclude, 'tis well that *all* our comforts have not left us together.

But the great support under these defects is, as the outward man perishes, — to find the inward man renewed day by day. What the river loses on the one side, it gains on the other — and then all's well enough. The *inward* man is the *better* man. Let strength and beauty go; and as they will not stay long — strive that you may be *strong in grace*, and *beautiful within*. Those things may make you acceptable unto men — but these will render you lovely both unto God, and to all wise men.

When Severus the emperor was sick of the gout, he was asked by one of his nobles, how he being so lame, could rule so vast an empire. He told him, that he ruled the empire with his *brain*, not with his *feet*. While the head and heart are strong — it matters less how it fares with the arms and legs.

Faith, hope and charity are beauties that will not fade. The decays of the body do by the blessing of God, further the true vigor of the soul. For the soul is a distinct substance, and as the house may be battered by a tempest, and yet the inhabitant merry in it all the while — so a holy soul may prosper very well — the the body be lame and ill.

And this decrease of strength and beauty are very useful to awaken the soul from that lethargy, which is natural to it. They deprive us only of that which is the fuel of our lusts. If our *strength* has not weaned us from the world — God will try what *feebleness* will do. If health and beauty has been a snare, these being removed, perhaps he may now speak with you, and be heard. When you have seen an end of all perfection, then he will show you that his commandments are exceeding broad, [Psalm 119.96](#).

Section 3. A third inconvenience and disadvantage upon aged people, is that they are weakened in their MENTAL FACULTIES.

Their	<i>minds</i>	are	dull,
their	<i>imagination</i> s	are	barren,
their	<i>memories</i>	are	broken,

and their *affections* are dry.

Formerly they could have penetrated into things — they could have learned anything. Now their *minds* are so clouded, that they fumble at the plainest things.

They could have soared by their *imagination*, and coined variety of notions; which they found to be a great help to their devotion and otherwise, but their imagination is now is grown poor, and their notions flat.

But the most sensible loss is of their *memory*, whereby formerly they could have produced things both new and old. But now their memory is so woefully shattered, that they forget what they said and did yesterday. O the excellent things that they have heard and read — and now they are like water spilt on the ground, no notices left that ever such things had been within.

Time was, their love and zeal for God, and their hatred to sin was strong as death, and ardent as the coals of fire, which has a most vehement flame — many waters could not quench it. Their holy joys and sorrows were transcendent; penitential tears were frequent with them. But now their hearts are cold, and their eyes are dry. These *wheels of the soul* are gone, and thereby their motion is sadly interrupted.

Now this manifest stroke upon their mental faculties, is a very sensible inconvenience. The decay of the *outward* man might be somewhat tolerable, but this *inward* decay sinks their spirits. When holy David said, [Psalm 6.2](#). "My bones are vexed!" his distress was great; but when he adds in the next verse, "my soul also is sore vexed!" his case was more lamentable. What comfort can a man have, when his mind is grown blunt? What's a knife good for, when the mettle is gone? When a man can *attain little* — and *retain nothing*? The deficiency of these is a great impediment in all human affairs, but of greater consequence in religious matters. The communion which the soul has with God is in the word and prayer — how desolate must the heart be, when one can remember almost nothing of what he reads or hears — when his affections flag, and his words freeze in prayer? Why, he thinks he has lived long enough, he feels himself more than half dead already. The house is left standing, but all the rich furniture is gone, and what can be said to mitigate this misery — or to reconcile any body to old-age?

To stop any further impatience, consider:

1. That this great decay in the mental faculties does not befall every aged person. Divers there are and have been — who retain the free use of their faculties until they die. There are many instances every day of fresh and lively brains in withered bodies. Yes, for the most part we may observe that according to the old saying, "What aged people most regard, they best remember." They seldom forget their money, or where they have laid up their *treasure*. So that this charge lies not against all aged people, nor in all cases.

2. These mental decays proceed not from old-age only, but many times from sloth and negligence. Their faculties would continue more entire to them, if they did exercise them with study and industry. But the best metal will rust with disuse — and the meanest metal by *constant use* will be kept bright and in good order.

3. The blasting of the mental faculties is not peculiar to old-age. For many diseases and other accidents often eclipse our faculties as well as old-age. Yes, many a man's bad morals, have spoiled his good intellectuals, before he has made one step into old-age. And therefore this misery is not to be confined to old-age, which neither attends *all* aged people, nor *only* such, nor merely upon the account of their age.

4. There is this comfort, that not all these decays are the fruit of sin — yet in themselves they are rather afflictions, than faults — and so are more workable to our

r good. How much better is the decay of our faculties — than the perverse use of them? Nay, how many things may we afford to forget, rather than chose to remember?

Again, as there may be quick apprehension, clear imagination, and firm memory — without one grain of grace. So there may be strong graces, where there are but lame mental faculties. You may have a *warm heart* — and a *weak head*. The favor of God is not determined by our natural parts, but is disposed according to his everlasting covenant; according to which he will require no more than he gives. He will welcome him that improves his two talents to four, with the same words as he was received, that made ten of his five.

And finally, it is a mercy that the use of your faculties is not wholly lost; that you are able, in some measure, to expound the book of Ecclesiastes concerning the vanity of all things below — though you cannot so clearly unfold the book of canticles; that you are able to understand and chose the best things; that you can press others to the things that you cannot now perform yourselves. An old man can direct — though he cannot work. When David was almost spent — yet you will find his last words were not in vain. In short, in unavoidable ship wrecks, as these are, we must not vainly murmur at what we have lost — but thankfully and diligently improve what we have left to us. For it is certain, that to him that has and improves what he has — it shall be given, and he shall have abundance.

Section 4. A fourth inconvenience and disadvantage incident to old-age, is the decay of their physical SENSES; and especially SEEING and HEARING, by which as through windows light is enters into the soul. For as in natural things nothing is found in the understanding, which was not before in the senses; so in spiritual things, the mysteries of religion are not invented by our minds, but conveyed to us by the sacred oracles. And therefore it is very probable that Satan bears a particular spite to these, as some have observed from the people possessed by him, whom he so frequently struck *deaf*, and *dumb*, and *blind*.

But it is evident, that as by these doors, sin entered into the soul, so we find our decays sooner in them, than in our other senses. The EYE grows dim, and the EAR it grows dull, and both grow worse and worse, and that without hope of cure. This was the case of the Patriarch Isaac, [Genesis 27.1](#): "And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, etc." Whereupon using his hands for eyes, he was mistaken in his own sons.

Indeed the degrees of these decays are different, in some less, in some greater. But as in houses the windows suffer first and most — so in our houses of clay, the organs of sight and hearing, do more or less, wax out of tune, before the whole fabric falls.

Now the decays of the eye and ear are grievous afflictions — when one can scarce discern one thing, or person, or one letter from another; to continue in a perpetual night or twilight — how difficult must it be? Or, to see people speak, and yet scarcely to hear what they say — it is next to being buried alive. For man is a sociable creature; and the all-wise God saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone. But the privation of these senses leaves a man to himself alone. He sits alone and keeps silence, because of his sensory deficits. He is liable to be *abused* and *injured* both in word and deed, and is incapable to help himself. He is also rendered *useless*; hereupon Torquatus excused himself from the consulship, saying it was n

not fit that he should be entrusted with the lives and fortunes of others, who himself could not see or hear, but with others eyes and ears.

Yes, which is worst of all, such people are precluded from the means of grace and salvation. There is no better company sometimes than a good book, but they cannot see a letter. And then faith comes by hearing, and it is preserved, and increased by the same means; but let them press ever so near, they can scarcely hear a distinct word, much less a whole sentence. What a dry and dead soul must that be — who lives unable to partake of the means of grace?

It is some question which of these losses is the greater, of the eye-sight or of the hearing. And upon some accounts the latter seems to be the sadder loss of the two; partly because God has ordained hearing, to be the ordinary means of grace and comfort — partly because there are no such, at least no such ready helps yet found out, for the dullness of the ear, as there are for the dimness of the eye. However, the decays of either of them, especially of *both* these senses, are a great disadvantage, and a heavy burden upon old-age.

Notwithstanding all this allegation, old-age is not altogether so miserable as it is painted. For there are many aged people, of whom it may be said, as it was of Moses, [Deuteronomy 34.7](#), "His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." So it pleases the Lord to continue to many aged people, very great vivacity in both those senses, the greater cause they have to be thankful for the same.

But though it must not be denied, that for the most part old-age is dim of sight and dull of hearing; yet 'tis as true, that even these decays are incident to younger people. How many young people may we meet with, that are defective in one or other of them? Some that are blind, others dim-sighted, some from their birth, some by casual accidents, some by distempers. Nay, it is one of the wonders of God's providence, that considering the *folly* and *rashness* of children, any of us carry our eyes untouched unto elder years! So that neither is this affliction to be confined to old-age.

Yes, if we grant that these defects should unavoidably befall aged people — yet they do not always make them useless — and then all's well enough. Even blind and deaf people have been more serviceable in their places, than multitudes of some people, who have their eyes and ears. Tully tells of some who were totally blind — yet ornaments to their country. In particular, he relates of Appius, who was old and blind — yet retaining his authority, he governed a great family with that dexterity, that his children feared him, his neighbors respected him; and when a dishonorable peace was likely to be made with Pyrrhus, he caused himself to be carried in his chair to the Senate, and there did effectually interpose to hinder it.

But that which should chiefly support a wise and godly man under these decays of the senses, is, the *comfortable review of the right use he has made of them* — that he has not used them as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but as the instruments of righteousness unto God. Or an hearty grief for his abuse of them — and the joyful prospect of the resurrection, when all our imperfections will be done away, and our vile bodies made like Christ's glorious body.

There's nobody much grieved at the lack of repair in a house which he is leaving, when he is ready to go to one that will need reparation no more. Yes, there is cause of thankfulness, that we have enjoyed the use of these senses so long — whereas we might have been born blind, and deaf, and dumb. But especially, that God has given us a *spiritual eye*, and an *inward ear*. Let that soul exceedingly rejoice, who has an eye to discern invisible things — even to behold him with whom it shall dwell forever. You should not take it heavily, that you lack such eyes as mice and other brute animals enjoy — but rather reckon yourself a blessed man, in having such eyes as angels have, whereby you may behold God himself!

And through the goodness of God, it often happens that these outward defects are more than compensated with greater measures of understanding and of memory. He may well be contented to lose an eye or ear, which must perish at last — that in lieu thereof receives a greater portion of faith, love, wisdom and patience, and so becomes the holier man, and the better Christian.

It is also some alleviation of this affliction, to consider that all these visible things are but *vanity* — yes *vanity of vanities*. That the eye is not satisfied with seeing — nor the ear filled with hearing. He who lacks his sight or hearing, escapes many a temptation, which frequently surprise the soul through those *windows*. How often does the heart walk after the *eyes*, and so steal away from God? How apt is every noise, to disorder the soul? So that as we are deprived of the *comfort* of these senses — so we are freed from the *snares* that attend them. And the answer is not to be forgotten which the godly man gave to Julian the apostate, who upbraided him, that his God had not cured him of his blindness; which was, that he praised his God with all his heart for his blindness, whereby he was kept from seeing such an ungracious face, as his was.

And lastly, let us that feel these decays greatly magnify the Lord, who has directed us to the use of glasses and spectacles, whereby we have in a manner new eyes put into our heads, and are enabled to read, and write, and work, even to the very sunset of our lives. This is so great a mercy, that we should do well to take thankful notice of it, every time we use them, to the praise of God, who is the father of lights, and from whose Holy Spirit comes the knowledge of such helpful inventions.

Section 5. The fifth inconvenience and disadvantage incident to old-age is, that it is burdened with DISEASE and PAIN. Thus Asa, 2 Kings 15.23: "In the time of his old-age was diseased in his feet." Then aches and diseases take possession of every part. Migraines and dizziness seize on the head; asthma and pneumonia on the lungs; palsies on the nerves; weakness and pain on the back and bones; gravel and stone on the gallbladder and bladder; the gout on the joints; the melancholy on the spleen; the colic on the intestines; and lastly, heart problems which carry the man away. So that an aged person is a very hospital of diseases, and *old-age is itself an incurable disease*, and any other added to it makes the case desperate. Some of them indeed fare better than others, but usually if they escape *acute diseases*, some *chronic distemper* attends them to their graves.

Now this is a very sensible inconvenience — none of these afflictions are joyous, but grievous. They vex and torment the body — so that a man has no mind to live, and yet no power to die. Hear Job, "I am a burden to myself." "My soul is weary of my life!" The old person cr

ies out with him, "All was well with me, but God shattered me; he seized me by the neck and crushed me. He has made me his target; his archers surround me. Without pity, he pierces my kidneys and spills my gall on the ground. Again and again he bursts upon me; he rushes at me like a warrior!" [Job 16:12-14](#).

These distempers and pain embitter all worldly comforts; house, goods, money, friends, relations — they are all dead to a man that is sick and in pain. They deprive a man of himself; he has ears and eyes — but no comfortable use of them. Those things that used to refresh him, now disgust him. His food and his bed tire him. The *absence* of his friends offends him, and he is disturbed with their *presence*. Poor wretch! He is not well, and nothing is well about him.

These also waste his estate, what will not one spend for ease and health? One remedy is commended and used — and then another; one physician employed — and then another. Skin for skin — all shall go for life and health.

Yes, these have a sad influence upon the *soul*. When it is lodged in a ruinous body, it is stifled within itself for lack of motion, and move it cannot, or but lamely for lack of strength. It is like a traveler with a tired horse; he spurs and whips it — but his horse cannot go. So here, the soul would pray, and meditate, and fly upward — but the dead weight of a diseased body hinders; so that both his flesh upon him has pain, and his soul within him mourns, [Job 14. 22](#).

But yet this burden is not to be appropriated to old-age, as if they and they only were the subject of distempers and of pain. For, if we observe it, we shall find diseases more common, yes and more dangerous, among young people, than among aged people. In the sacred story you will meet with more young people brought to our Savior for cure, than aged people. There was Jairus' daughter, there was the nobleman's son, there was the Syrophenician's daughter, and then the centurion's servant, with many others.

In *contagious diseases*, it's evident that the young are sooner infected, and every register will inform us, that a far greater number of infants and young people are yearly carried to their *long home*, than of aged people.

And then for *casualties*, there are far more of young and middle-aged people, that are slain and taken captives, than of the old.

Neither are all aged people so laden with these pains and distempers; many of them having a very convenient measure of health to their lives end. Thus Tully brings in Cato at eighty-four years of age declaring, that notwithstanding these years, he was well enough to appear in the senate, to defend his client, and to entertain his friends. And King Masinissa, who at ninety years old, would not be persuaded to ride in his journeys, or to be covered on his head in the hardest frost, or sharpest storm. And one old man made nothing of walking twenty miles to dine with a relation, when he was over an hundred years old.

Neither are these diseases always the fruits of old-age, but rather of an *heedless and intemperate youth*. This lays up such crudities, surfeits and noxious humours, which lurk in us un

til old-age, and then seize upon us; and then we find fault with the cancer in our stomach, but forget the rich foods which have caused it.

So that this inconvenience does neither befall all aged people, nor only them, nor only upon the account of their old-age.

The best supports however for the aged under their maladies, are a deep study on the wisdom, power, goodness, and promises of God. His wisdom, whereby he knows what condition is best for us. His power, whereby he has all diseases at his command, as the centurion had his servants. His goodness, whereby he pities us more than the tenderest parent does his weak child — who also knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust, [Psalm 103.1](#)

3,			14.		His		promises:
That	he	will	not	afflict	without	need,	Lam. 3.33.
That	he	will	correct	in	measure,	Jeremiah 30.11.	
That	he	will	not	leave	us,	Psalm 23.4.	
That	all	shall	work	for	the	best,	Romans 8.28.

That he will cease, when his good ends are accomplished, [Lam. 3.22.](#)

And then we should revolve the *great benefit* and use of them. For by our distempers, the Lord is pleased to show us more effectually the frailty of our condition, the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, and many other lessons that are not commonly learned otherwise.

It's plain, that these are fair warnings to us to provide a better house for the soul, that will endure. "In this disease," said old Olevian, "I have learned to know aright what sin is — and what the majesty of God is." "Nay, said that learned Rivet near his death, "I have learned more divinity in these ten days of my sickness, than in fifty years before; it has sent me home to God!" And now who would not be content with such useful discipline?

To CONCLUDE, try it who will, there is no condition of life without some inconvenience. Marriage is desired — but how many troubles in it? Children are longed for — but how many griefs with them? Rich people are counted happy — but how many thorns are found there?

Afflictions are the tributes of life, which if a man know how to bear patiently, his soul will be bettered, and his virtues adorned. Our business is to prepare for them beforehand, to lay up a stock of prayers, of patience, of promises, of faith, of evidences. And when they come, to possess our souls in patience, to resign up ourselves to the holy will of God. And if we cannot turn off this our burden, to carry it with all the ease and satisfaction we can; and to keep a sound mind, if we cannot have a sound body.

Section 6. A sixth inconvenience in old-age is, that it is broken with *crosses and outward troubles*. These, though they meet us in every stage of our life — yet a *whole troop* of them commonly fall upon us in old-age. Then does *poverty* often come as an armed man — his *getting* days are gone, now his *spending* time is come. And if he has need of much, and yet has little in store — he seems to be in a miserable condition. The cynic philosopher, when he was asked, what was the most calamitous creature in the world, confidently answered: it was an indigent old person.

Likewise everybody is ready to take advantage of the aged, reckoning that they are least able to defend themselves. Very often it falls out, that a combination of troubles seize upon aged people.

And of these troubles, the sharpest are from their *relations*; the disobedience of some, or the death of others. How does the pride, prodigality or wilfulness of children or grand-children provoke, and grieve the hoary head! And how many aged people see husband, wife, children, and other dear friends, and relations hastened to the grave before them, which do each of them, as it were, tear away a piece of him, and leave him as a sparrow alone upon the house-top.

In short, old-age is recorded as the *sink* of man's life, into which run all the miseries incident to human nature.

And that which makes this burden more grievous, is that these seize upon the people when their strength is spent, their spirits low, and their bodily infirmities many. They are within sight of the shore — and yet in danger to be sunk and wracked with the storms which beat upon them. When they had thought all their troubles had been blown over, it frets them sore to meet them again. And especially, if they have had *plenty* and *prosperity* in the course of their lives — their straits, losses and troubles, now aggravate their affliction.

Now to mitigate these pressures, we must know:

1. That these crosses are common to all. As they do not infallibly attend all aged people, for many have fair weather all their journey long — so they befall all mankind indifferently in every part of life. If these are miseries — then there's no mortal man without his misery. We are in this world, as Israel was in the wilderness, who had no day without a cloud — but then they had no night without a glimpse of light. Where dwells the man, or of what mettle is he made — who has not met with straits and vexations — who has not buried many of his relations and friends? So that we must quarrel with every age, as well as old-age, yes with the providence of God by this argument.

2. These crosses are necessarily hurtful to none. They are not properly and entirely evils. Sinful evils are the only real evils.

These afflictions are inflicted by him who is eminently good; they guide and help us towards the greatest good; they were upon him who was entirely good.

Prosperity has — but adversity has never hurt a godly man.

Yes some of the heathen have been bold to judge those men miserable, who have never met with any troubles. Afflictions are our medicine, which may disturb us. But sin is our poison, which will destroy us. The bitterest medicine — is better than the sweetest poison.

3. These crosses are useful to those who are godly. Though they are briars, thorns and thistles in themselves — yet by the blessing of God, they prove sweet-briars and holy-thistles to holy men. How many things do we count evil, that are most *wholesome* for us? The

y exercise our faith, our wisdom, our patience, and the trial of these is more precious than of fine gold. They teach us many lessons more effectually, than the Word itself without them can do. The surgeon and the executioner do both bind men, but to different ends; the one does it to bereave of life — the other to preserve it. When the godly man is bound in fetters, and held in cords of affliction — then the Lord shows them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He opens also their ears to discipline, [Job 36.8, 9](#).

4. These crosses and afflictions are most fit for aged men. They are or should be most strong to bear them. They have had a long summer — to lay up for a sharp winter. If they have not stored up a great deal of faith and patience, they have slept in harvest. They also have been trained, and inured to them before this time of day, by long experience. They have received much *good* at the hands of the Lord, and therefore may the better receive *crosses*.

The true and only remedy against crosses and outward troubles, is faith and patience; which the wise God has largely prescribed in the 11th and 12th Chapters of the Hebrews. By these a sound Christian shall not only bear these onsets, but overcome them, and adorn the hoary head with trophies.

It is our best way to bear what we cannot change, and to attend God without murmuring, from whom all ailments come. For it is a bad soldier that follows his commander *grumbling*. But we have a more sure word of prophecy, [Romans 8.28](#). All things, mark it, all things work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. This blessed word, if it is understood, believed and considered; and our love to God and effectual calling evinced, is alone able, God's spirit accompanying it — to settle, quiet, and comfort our hearts under all troubles whatever.

Let it therefore be the chief care of all aged people to make their calling and election sure, to strengthen their faith in God, and by their hope to travel into the eternal world. For then only will our afflictions feel light, while we look not at things seen, but at things unseen. The thoughts of the grave will mortify us to things seen, and the thoughts of the country beyond the grave will realize the unseen world — and then our *troubles* will be easy, and our *crosses* blessings. The sight of the *approaching shore*, will make an aged person bear the present storms with cheerfulness, knowing that he shall shortly be well in Heaven. "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto my self, so that I may finish my course with joy!" [Acts 20.24](#).

Section 7. The seventh inconvenience that is charged on old-age is, that it is attended with CONTEMPT. Aged people commonly are despised, especially when they are not supported with good estates. Most people *avoid* them, and *treat them as bothersome creatures*. For the generality of men do value others not for their wisdom, or real virtue — but either for some likeness of disposition, or some usefulness. Now the old are not, by the disparity of their years, so complaisant, nor by their disability so helpful as heretofore; and thereupon they are despised by younger people. Especially also when they are grown decrepit, and confined to their chairs or chambers — then are they an eye-sore to their successors, w

ho secretly wish them well in Heaven, or anywhere out of their way upon earth. It is too evident, how unpleasing their groans, their coughing, and their other weaknesses are. Those who can brook the inconveniences of their *children* — cannot bear with it in their *parents*. All their former efforts and pains are forgotten, and they are beheld, as last years almanacs, wholly out of date.

Now this is a sore affliction, and touches man or woman to the quick. For such as have been regarded and revered — to be neglected and despised, grates even the most sincere spirits. Said Job, "Men listened to me expectantly, waiting in silence for my counsel. After I had spoken, they spoke no more; my words fell gently on their ears. They waited for me as for showers and drank in my words as the spring rain. When I smiled at them, they scarcely believed it; the light of my face was precious to them. I chose the way for them and sat as their chief; I dwelt as a king among his troops; I was like one who comforts mourners. But now they mock me, men younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs! And now they mock me with vulgar songs! They taunt me! They despise me and won't come near me, except to spit in my face!" Job 29-30

The respect and honor that one has formerly had — makes his present contempt more intolerable. Not but that a godly man is satisfied with himself; but he is aware, that hereby he is rendered useless to others. For when the person is despised, neither his example nor his counsel, let them be ever so profitable, will be regardable or useful — he passes for an old fogy, and there's an end. That man is a burden to himself — who discerns that he is a burden to every body else.

But yet as we have observed in other cases, this inconvenience is not peculiar to old-age, as if they alone were despised, or disregarded: for those who will despise them, will disdain other sober and wise people also, yes they will despise God himself. Plain is the connection, "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD." [Leviticus 19:32](#). Those who will despise an old person upon that score, will despise the ancient of days Himself; so that they are not alone under this inconvenience.

Neither is this contempt universal; some young people have that wisdom which teaches them to value and respect their elders. Thus Tully again brings in Cato answering Caecilius, who had said that "There was nothing more miserable in old-age, than to find themselves odious to others." "Nay, says Cato, "I believe such old men as we, are very acceptable to some young men;" and so goes on, showing that all judicious young men take delight, and yield great respect to grave and old men. And thus Plato brings in Socrates saying, "I love to hear the discourses of old men, seeing they have already traced the way that I must go."

But however it is, this inconvenience is not the fault of old-age, but rather of such undutiful relations, who have forgotten the law of nature; or of such inconsiderate people, as never foresee that the case will before long be their own; and they must look for the same measure, which they have meted to others, to be repaid into their bosoms.

The infirmities of aged people should rather breed pity, than contempt. Inasmuch as though, by reason of their age, they are become twice children. And though, by reason of their fee-

ebleness or poverty, they cannot vindicate their just authority, or punish their despisers; yet God will certainly take up their cause, and revenge their wrongs.

In the meantime they must comfort themselves
in the favor and protection of the most high,
in the promises which he has made,
in the judgment and esteem which he has of them,
in the integrity of their hearts,
in the former usefulness of their live, and
in the hopes they have to be shortly out of the reach either of envy or contempt.

What matter is it for the esteem of a company of worms, when a man is well accounted of by God Himself? How easily may he lack the respect of men — who enjoys the smiles of God? Alas we are but strangers in this world, and therefore must not grudge to be strangely used. He greatly forgets himself, and the country to which he is traveling — who is much concerned either with the admiration, or contempt of foolish men.

Yet it should be the care of all aged people, to use all good means to prevent, as much as may be, this inconvenience; namely, to watch against all peevishness, covetousness, envy, and all the other aforesaid vices of old-age: for there is nothing which does so much vilify, and bring contempt on a person, as sin. And then to study and practice wisdom, patience and charity, and those other graces before specified. For there is nothing which does so much command regard and respect, as the image of God. Sincere piety will procure respect, more than nobility or riches; and you have seldom seen aged people despised, but for some real or supposed failings. Particular instances do never invalidate, but establish general rules; and that is: "those who honor me, I will honor, and those who despise me, shall be lightly esteemed." [1 Samuel 2.30](#).

Section 8. The eighth infelicity of old-age is, that it is disabled from service, and rendered incapable of doing good in their generation. Which though it is an *effect* of some of the former things — yet is a distinct affliction. When the faculties are impaired, the strength exhausted, pains and diseases inflicted — Alas, what service can such a one do for the church! How little for the common-wealth! How little for their own family? Hence the *Levites* at age fifty, were discharged from the substance of their work. Hence the *soldier* at sixty was retired. For how should the head, heart or hand be serviceable — which are shattered with breach upon breach? His useful days are done. He must now be laboring for life, who before lived for labor. They see things out of order in the places where they live, but they cannot amend them. He who formerly could have studied many hours, is spent now with a few minutes. And those who have served at the altar, are now glad just to sit by the fire. Hence the old Roman proverb, "Let those who are sixty years old be thrown off the bridge; for their work is done, they live to no purpose."

Now this is a heavy trouble to a godly man, yes to any sincere man. Such know that usefulness is the end and happiness of life. Take away usefulness — and what is life good for? A man is thenceforth but a *cipher* — yes and worse; for he eats, and drinks, and troubles the

world — and cannot benefit the society in any way. Hereupon in a certain country, its said, that the aged people, when they found themselves decrepit, went into an adjacent climate, where by the quality of the air they soon died.

Plato could say, "the more beneficial we can be to mankind — the more like we are to God." To become therefore disabled from service — is death to an active useful spirit. Besides, as employment makes improvement — so on the other side rest breeds rust, and those who leave off the acts, lose the habits, and become more empty and insignificant than ever they were before. Upon all which accounts this disability is a most disconsolate affliction, and sufficient of itself to sink their weak spirits with despair.

But as we have observed in other cases, this grievance is not peculiar to old-age. But people of all ages have divers ways become unable to serve their generation. Some by the *hand of God* — inflicting such distempers on their minds or bodies, as have made them useless in their places. Some by the *procurement of men* — by whom many in the prime of their time have been laid aside; sometimes justly, sometimes unjustly — and all opportunity taken from them of doing good in the world.

Neither are all aged people rendered useless: for there are many of both sexes, that persevere in well-doing to the last. Cato pleaded cases, when he was past fourscore years, and Socrates wrote excellent things at ninety-four years of age. And not only the *tongues*, but the *hands* of very many aged people are found as nimble to good works, as of younger people. Those who have been useful in their strength, will scarcely ever become useless in their weakness. Plutarch observes that an industrious bee, never degenerates into a drone, even in its old-age.

Too many there are of every age that live only to themselves, who neither serve God, nor observe man, but in order to their own interest, or appetite — these are good for nothing, young or old. But those who understand, and embrace the true ends of life, will be useful one way or other, to their lives end.

And the great service that the old do perform, is by their *sage advice*. When the Levites were at fifty years old, released from the labor of the sanctuary, they are said yet to be judges in their cities. So that although they cannot do that service which younger people may — yet they do greater: for the greatest things are compassed, not by strength, but counsel. They cannot be counted useless, says Tully, who prescribe to the more raw and ignorant their work. Like as a pilot, who though he runs not up and down the ship, but sits at the helm — yet is the most useful person in the ship: so the aged head is the most useful part in a family or commonwealth, though it is confined to the fireside.

Hence *Homer* brings in Agamemnon, wishing rather for an aged wise man among the Greeks — than so many Ajax's, who was a man of arms, for the winning of Troy. And it is well known, that the grand magistrates both in Greece and Rome were the ancients of their cities; and thereupon they were called Senators, and the great council of Rome, the senate, being composed of aged men.

Yes if they should by reason of their age be wholly unserviceable — yet their *example* is useful. To see a man or woman deprived of all outward comfort and respect, and laden with he

avy distempers — yet patient and thankful, serious and devout — it is a powerful lecture to all the spectators. It may teach them to be doing their own great work with all their might, to be thankful to God for their present strength and ease, to beware of slothfulness and selfishness — that when they arrive at that decrepit estate, they may have the pleasant prospect of a fruitful life behind them, and the joyful prospect of a blessed life before them.

Section 9. The ninth disadvantage of old-age is, that it is unfit for religious exercises. When we are in later years, we are indisposed to prayer and fasting, to hearing or reading, and in general to all such spiritual employments, wherein the soul and body must concur. They need these helps as much as others, and perhaps desire them as much as others — but the dead weight of an infirm body sinks down the towering of their precious souls. To will is present with them, but how to perform the same, they find not. And no wonder, having not only a law of sin within them — but a body of death without them! Their senses are grown weak, their faculties weak, their spirits weak — how then can they wrestle with God in prayer, or continue instant therein?

Let the rider be never so good a horseman — yet he can travel only as much his horse will carry him. Just so, let the soul be ever so active — it can operate only as the organs of the body will permit it.

Instead of taking pains about their souls, the aged are often forced to prop up their decrepit bodies. Their weaknesses keep them in bed — while the holy zeal of others is burning in devotion. And as the old woman being asked why she went no faster, answered, "Because she carried so great a load — namely, of eighty four years on her back." So the load on aged peoples back either hinders them from coming to holy assemblies, or else causes them to travel there very slowly; so that they are constrained to live, in a manner, without God while in this poor world.

Now this affliction to a holy heart, is a very heavy burden. When a poor man is cut short in all his other comforts, and as it were besieged with all the calamities of this life; yet while he has this river of God's ordinances free and open, thereby he receives continual supplies from heaven, the streams thereof make glad the city of God — but when this is stopped, the soul grows sad, and dry, and barren. Hence holy David in his exile, never mentioning his temporal losses — yet cries out, "These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng." [Psalm 42:4](#). This went nearest to his heart. For when a man is harassed with cares and troubles all the week long — yet he is relieved and refreshed in his approach unto God upon his own day. But with the decrepit old man, every day is alike, and his soul is left destitute of spiritual supplies in an ordinary way.

And this affliction is saddest of all, when by disuse of the means of grace, the soul grows stupid and unconcerned in the matter; as without special grace, we shall be apt to be — so that the misery is great in the lack, and greater when *insensible* of the lack. No great wonder therefore that when all these miseries meet together, a man cry out with Job, "I hate my life and don't want to go on living." [Job 7:16](#). So that Tiberius Caesar had a saying, that it w

as a shameful thing for a man that was past sixty, to stretch out his hand to a physician; reckoning that it was fit he should then be content to die.

But yet, if we weigh the matter well, the case of aged people is not so desperate as it seems. For to proceed in our former method — it is evident that many others besides the aged are cut short in the means of grace; some willingly in employment beyond the seas; some willfully by their own atheism and ungodliness; some unwillingly by distempers and other hindrances.

And on the other side, divers aged people have been capable to attend the service of God even to their dying day. Thus Ahijah, though his eyes were set for old age — yet was enabled to prophecy to Jeroboam's wife. And Jacob could worship God, leaning on the top of his staff. And John was an evangelist, when he was a hundred years old. "And there was Anna, a widow of about eighty-four years — yet departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." [Luke 2.37](#). So all aged people are not precluded from spiritual exercises.

And though they should become unable to frequent the public ordinances of God — yet they may pray, and sigh, and meditate in their chambers; and these, proceeding from a sincere and sensible soul, are most acceptable unto God. As for the *external* acts of religion — they avail nothing without faith and love, which lodge in the *heart*. The immanent acts of the soul, which are to *understand*, to *meditate*, to *will*, and to *desire* — do most perfectly the same. And where the deed cannot be done — God accepts the will for the deed. The weakest and poorest old man or woman may have high meditations under a low roof — and a large heart within narrow walls.

No aged person therefore should be discouraged by their inability for God's service; since he knows their frame — he remembers that they are but dust. The Lord has said, "When the poor and needy search for water and there is none, and their tongues are parched from thirst — then I, the LORD, will answer them. I, the God of Israel, will never abandon them. I will open up rivers for them on the high plateaus. I will give them fountains of water in the valleys. I will fill the desert with pools of water. Rivers fed by springs will flow across the parched ground." [Isaiah 41:17-18](#). That is, in the lack of ordinary supplies, I will provide them with extraordinary supports. The wilderness shall produce a pool of water — rather than any child of God shall die for thirst. When they cannot wait upon God as before — he will wait to be gracious to them, he will come to them, and teach, and comfort them.

Section 10. The tenth and last inconvenience in old-age, is, that they are terrified with the approach of DEATH. For death is a word hard to digestion to any man. The philosopher counted it of all dreadful things, the most terrible. King Hezekiah was more afraid of death, than of all Sennacherib's army.

Now old-age is a near neighbor to death, and the prospect of death is always before them — this is not very pleasant. Most men, says Seneca, are miserably tossed between the fear of death and the miseries of life — are unwilling either to live or die. Especially those who h

ave had *their portion in this life*, and have made no provision for eternity. This made Lewis 11th of France to charge all about him, to forbear the mention of death.

The strict account which follows death, and the long eternity which follows that — makes death a most serious matter. No wonder if the hand trembles, when it is going to take that cup — which will *mend* or *end* them. Now the old man is at the door of this fatal place. Though a *casualty* may bring death suddenly — though a *sickness* may bring it probably — yet old-age brings it *certainly*. Perhaps there are fifty weeks or days remaining in their life, perhaps but forty five; perhaps but forty, but thirty, yes but twenty, as Abraham said of Sodom. Nay, since life is dubious every moment, and no mortal man knows at what watch of the night he shall be called to judgement and eternity — the person that is but a step from death, must be through fear of death, in continual bondage.

But the *lion* is not so terrible as he is painted — neither is *death* so formidable as it is by many represented. Though it is against the desires of nature — yet it is not against the course of nature. For if we consult this, we find Autumn kindly after Summer, and Winter after Autumn; and death is as natural after old-age. And the light of nature taught some of the heathens to reckon the worthy men, especially those who are dead, to be most truly alive; in that while we live in this world, the soul is imprisoned in the body, and is set at liberty by death.

Thus Cyrus discourses to his children on his death-bed, "Think not, O my sons, that I leave you quite, and am lost when I die; perhaps you will not see me, neither do you now see the most essential part of me, nor ever did: only by my actions you believed it was in this body, and that will live out of this body as well as in it."

And if *pagans* set so light by death — then what notion should we *Christians* have of it, who can look more clearly beyond it? Death is styled a *falling asleep*, and what's more welcome to an aged person than a sound sleep?

In short,

1. Not all aged people are oppressed with the fear of death. Too few there are who think at all of it. Men generally put the evil day far from them; and it will be an evil day to such as put it far from them. Most people can think of any place in the parish rather than the graveyard. Yes, I believe it is one of the faults of the aged to think so seldom of death — and those who think little of it, are in no danger of being frightened with its thoughts.

2. The young have the same reason to be concerned about dying as the old. For youth has more ways to death than old age has. And far more die in their youth, than that die of old age. It's true, they *hope* to live longer, but their hopes have no good ground at all. They have neither promise nor experience to build their hopes upon. And in young peoples death, they being in their strength, nature receives a more violent shock — whereas the aged are more quietly extinguished, like a candle in the socket.

3. No godly man need be affrighted at the approach of death. For the power and sting of death is utterly taken away by our Savior's death — and so it can do us no hurt. A child of God does not so much as *taste* death. The true believer now has not to do with death — but

with its shadow,
 with a toothless dog,
 with a dead lion,
 with a wasp without a sting,
 with a conquered enemy.

What man in his wits is afraid after a tempestuous voyage — that he is drawing near his *haven*. It was a sweet saying of Ambrose, near his end:

"I have not so lived, that I am ashamed to live among you — neither do I fear to die, going to so good a master."

The unprepared and the ungodly may dread death. As Aristippus told the wicked mariners t rembling in a storm, "You may well be afraid, going to receive your just punishment. But ho ping for my reward in the next life, I am not of death at all."

But now when a man has set his house and heart in order, and finished his work, he may di e with comfort, and say as that holy woman, "I am one that neither wishes death, nor fears his might — but as merry as one that's bound for Heaven."

4. There is much folly in this slavish fear of death. A holy care to *prepare* for it — is far bett er than an unprofitable fear of death. The passion of fear is planted in us for the avoiding o f things hurtful — but there is no avoiding of this fate. "None of us can hold back our spirit f rom departing. None of us has the power to prevent the day of our death. There is no esca ping that obligation, that dark battle." [Ecclesiastes 8:8](#) That disquiet is therefore foolish, tha t torments, but profits not. How can the mind be quiet at any time, which is afraid of what i s impending at all times. Shall learned old men fear that, which foolish young men do not? O wretched old man, said Tully, that in so long a life has not learned to despise death! I en d this with the observation of judicious John Calvin: "He who cannot quiet his heart in the h oly contempt of death, has profited but little in the faith of Christ." Let it therefore be the bu siness of each aged person to be reconciled to death; to be dying daily, by mortifying your affections to all the vanities of this life, and by meditating on the life to come. Never fret at that death which leads you to immortality. Rather rejoice, that you are taking leave of a wor ld of sin, and taking flight into a land of purity and holiness. O sir, (said one to a noble old minister, that trembled at the approach of death) shut your eyes but a little, and you shall s ee God in glory.

And thus I conclude this particular, that too many aged people never fear death, for they ne ver spend thoughts about it; that the young have as much reason to apprehend it, as the ol d; that a slavish fear of it is folly in any; and that no godly man needs to be affrighted, but rather comforted with it.

So that upon a just survey of all the inconveniences of old-age, all aged people may answe r, as Tully tells of one Gorgias, who being 107 years old, was asked why he was contented t o live so long? "Why," said he, "I have nothing whereof to accuse old-age; and the truth is, it seems perverse and unreasonable, that all people should desire to attain unto it, and the n when they have attained it, to dislike it's difficulties and disadvantages that come with it.

Whereof no age or condition is free, but they are tolerable and helpful to the good of all that fear God." And so much may suffice for this fifth point to be handled.

Chapter 6. The PRIVILEGES and COMFORTS of old-age.

Section I.

I proceed now in the sixth place, to discourse the privileges and comforts of old-age. That there is some peculiar *blessing* and *dignity* in old-age, is evident, both by the light of Scripture, and the light of nature. The first commandment with promise is, "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." [Ephesians 6:3](#). The like promise you will find in [Psalm 91:16](#), "With long life will I satisfy him." Which shows that old-age, whatever inconveniences it is attended withal, is in itself a special blessing.

And on the contrary, it is threatened as an *heavy judgment* unto Eli, "Behold, the time is coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your own father's house, that there shall not be an old man in your house." [1 Samuel 2:31](#)

And in general, that bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days, "But You, O God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of destruction; men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days." [Psalm 55:23](#). Whereupon holy David prays, [Psalm 102.24](#), "O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days."

Finally, the Holy Spirit assures us, that the beauty of old men, is the gray head, [Psalm 20.29](#). By all which it plainly appears, that old-age is a desirable mercy, in the estimate of God himself.

And if that is a real good thing which all men desire, then certainly there is some peculiar goodness in old-age, for that all men desire to attain it. So also we mingle among our good wishes to others — this of a long life. When kings and grandees are saluted, this is the common acclamation, that they may live long, and if it were possible, live forever.

So then as there are some *inconveniences* in old-age, which as you have seen, have divers things to mitigate them; so old-age has many privileges and comforts which quite overbalance them. God has set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him. There is only this difference, that *all our troubles spring from below — but all our mercies drop from above*. The particular privileges and comforts of old-age, are these following.

First, old-age is greater in AUTHORITY, than any other age. There is an authority resulting from the law of nature, as well as that which is conferred by civil laws; the former is that with which old-age is invested. God himself, who is the fountain of honor, has given them a patent for it: so that their authority has something in it divine, and *they seem to have a kind of natural government over others*. Hereby the sentence or opinion of the aged may well conclude — as much as the arguments of the younger; and he must have a great deal of wisdom or of confidence, that shall contradict what a wise aged person has asserted.

That there is a certain authority in old-age, is plain from divers Scriptures. As, [Isaiah 9.15](#) "The elderly and honored man, he is the head." Now we know that the head is the seat of rule. When Moses had occasion for some coadjutors with him in judgment, the Lord caused seventy of the *elders* of Israel, to be set apart for that work, [Numbers 11.16](#). And so the judges who constituted the Sanhedrin, were made up of seventy two *elders*. Again, when the apostle would most efficaciously persuade Philemon, verse 9. He accosts him with his title of honor, being such a one as *Paul the aged*. And the beloved disciple authorizes his two latter epistles with this, "The *elder* to the elect lady; and the *elder* to the well-beloved Gaius." And as this preeminence proceeds from the will of the all-wise God, so it is the sense of wise men.

The philosopher affirms, that the elder do naturally precede the younger. And Tully tells us, that as anyone exceeded in years, so he had a kind of ruling voice in debates. Yes, Pliny reports of the elephants, and of the very ants, that when they go by troops, the elder commonly lead the others.

And there is a very rational ground for this authority in old-age. In that the greater seniority any one has in years, the nearer, even upon that account, do they approach to the likeness of the eternal God, who is called the *Ancient of Days*. "The hair of his head was white like wool!" [Daniel 7:9](#)

Withal, it is presumed that *the aged know more*, for that they have seen and heard more than the younger. Now wisdom and knowledge claim authority, by a certain natural right, because the determinations proceeding thence, are ever supposed to be grounded on the soundest maxims.

Now this authority is a considerable privilege, for it derives weight unto all counsels, reproofs, or instructions. The judge's decrees are held ponderous by reason of his years, as well as from his office. The ministers advice becomes venerable by the authority which his age has clothed him with. The old physician can sway by his authority more than the younger. So that authority is a talent, which being well employed, does much further our usefulness in the world.

Yes, the **example** of the aged is more effectual than others; for one may learn much from such an one, though he says never a word. The more authority any man has, the more conspicuous he is, he is like a city set on a hill, and his way and example are still instructive. The dignity of the person ever adds luster to the example. And therefore all aged people had need to be circumspect in their ways, lest instead of leading others in the narrow way to life, they do by their example lead them in the broad way to destruction.

It does therefore greatly behoove all those who are in later years, to be sober, grave, temperate, etc. for the hoary head is a crown of glory, IF it is found in the way of righteousness, [Proverbs 16.31](#). *That which is the crown of glory on the hoary head, is the wisdom and piety that lodges in the heart.* The heathen could say, gray hairs and wrinkles do not automatically create authority, but the former life well managed, makes the latter part of life justly respected.

So that old age, simply considered, will not *always* pass for a leading demonstrative argument; as if it were enough to say, "I am an old man, and therefore you must needs believe or yield unto me." No, true worth and wisdom must lead the van: but it is a good second, and carries with it a great presumption, that prudence and piety dwell there. And hence it is, that in all societies and assemblies, whether civil or religious, that dignity is allowed to seniority, that commonly the eldest presides in the company, and guides the affairs thereof.

Section II. The second privilege of old-age is, that it is richer in EXPERIENCE, than any other age. This is manifest on the first view, that *experience is the consequence of a long life*. We have a confused knowledge of things by hear-say, or instruction, but by tract of time we arrive at an experimental knowledge thereof. Job could say, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you!" [Job 42.5](#). By which it appears, that ocular demonstration is the most certain, wherein old-age has the greatest advantage. The aged have lived long enough to find, in worldly matters, what is true and what is false. We discover what is safe, or dangerous in matters of practice, to the well-tried maxims of men in years. What was it, which found out the nature and use of herbs and drugs, but long observation? It's true, *experience* is a dear mistress, and yet 'tis a sure one, and the instructions we have that way, stick fastest to us.

We far sooner forget the particulars of those countries of which we have merely *read*, than of those which we have *traversed* ourselves. The aged believer can tell *experimentally* . . .
of the wisdom and justice of God's providence,
of the truth of his promises and threatenings,
of the devices of Satan,
of the deceitfulness of riches,
of the wisdom of integrity,
of the vanity of all carnal delights,
of the wickedness of his own heart.

Old-age is rich in the experience of these things, whereby they are able to govern themselves, and to advise others.

As for themselves, by *experience* they are taught to avoid many dangers, which others fall into. For it is made up from long observation of particular things — namely, of memory of things past, knowledge of things present, and providence of things future. And as their long trial of the effects of diet, and exercise, have made them capable of the conservation of health — so their manifold experience of the deceitfulness of the flesh, of the world, and of the devil, has enabled them to counter and conquer them. And as to others, their experience renders them able to give the most prudent counsels, and to forewarn them of those consequences, which they easily foresee.

Education teaches only general notions, but experience acquaints us with particular actions, by conversing with which we arrive at skill and conduct. Justin relates it of Alexander the Great, that he would have his squadrons led by none under sixty years old. For who will choose him for a captain that's well-read in martial affairs — and that's all? Who will trust his life in

the hands of a *speculative* physician? No, experience goes further in all these things than learning.

For the aged and experienced person having seen such great mistakes in himself and others, is cured of that vain credulity, which has ruined young people; and having met with so many disappointments in the world, is well freed from that carnal confidence, which has undone others. And yet their great experience of the power and faithfulness of God, is a mighty bulwark to their faith. As they have heard, so have they seen in the city of God, and what he has done to vindicate his attributes, and to verify his promises. Hence holy David, [Psalm 37.25](#), "I have been young, and now am old: yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." This was the advantage he had by his old-age, to trace out the providence of God towards the posterity of godly men, that walking in their parents steps, they were seldom or never reduced to abject poverty, at least to common beggary; or if so — yet were never quite forsaken of God, as himself found, when though, [1 Samuel 21.3](#) and [25.8](#). He was glad to ask supplies of men — yet was he still supported and owned of God.

The good old man can say, "You are my king of old, O God!" [Psalm 74.12](#). He can say, "I remembered your judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself!" [Psalm 119.52](#). And thus he may direct others. And thus a man may vindicate and honor God, "Concerning your testimonies, I have known of old, that you have founded them forever!" [Psalm 119.152](#).

The inexperienced newness of any case or trouble, is apt to stagger the strongest faith or courage. Such things assault a man by way of surprise — but when we have had an experience of them, we are corroborated to grapple with them. No doubt *the first night* was a strange thing to Adam and Eve, who had seen nothing but light before, but when when they found by experience the return of the light again, they could brook it well enough. So the burden that did at first affright us — by often carrying it, we easily bear it, [Psalm 63.7](#), "Because you have been my help, therefore in the shadow of your wings will I rejoice." And it is conceived, that this caused David to speak so highly of Goliath's sword, [1 Samuel 21.9](#). "There is none like that, give it to me." He might have found another sword of equal mettle, but he had experience of the effectiveness of Goliath's sword, and so there was none like that.

From this long experience, the aged person not only despises many things which others admire; but grows able to give the best estimate concerning future events, both in public and particular cases. So that such people may well be resorted unto as to *common oracles* — IF they have treasured up wisdom according to their years.

To conclude this, there lies a *double duty* upon aged people in reference hereunto; the one is, to take due notice of all such passages of the providence of God, or the improvidence of men, that come within the sphere of their cognizance, and not heedlessly to neglect them. Another is, to store up in their memories such observations. For experience is made up of divers memories of the same things, [Psalm 143.5](#), "I *remember* the days of old, I *meditate* on all your works, I *muse* on the work of your hands." And then to produce these in time and place convenient, either for their own, or for other's direction, caution or consolation.

Section III. Thirdly, another privilege of old-age, is that it is FREER FROM SIN. T

he corruption of nature, and the fruits thereof, are the great blot, and woeful plague upon mankind. The first thing which every person, arrived at the use of reason should seriously set about, should be to be healed of it. But instead of that, most people meeting with temptations without them, and finding strength and youth within them — forget the care of their hereditary disease, and pursue their iniquities with greediness. Some are tickled with applause, and so they hunt after an *airy renown*, and an ungrounded reputation. Others let the reins loose to *sensual delights*, and *wallow in the pleasures of sin* for a season. Others setting aside all fear of God, and love to their neighbor — are set upon *revenge*, and will run down everyone that stands in their way. Others hoping for that *satisfaction in riches*, which they will never find — set their minds to grasp after a plentiful estate by hook or crook.

Now the some young people do happily escape these snares, as was the case of Obadiah; and some aged people are unhappily entrapped in them, as was the case of Solomon. Yet most commonly youth, by reason of it's inexperience and unmortifiedness, is full of sin. Job could reflect on *the sins of his youth* — and David saw cause to cry for the pardon of those offences. Hence Aristotle would scarcely admit youth as capable of moral lectures. And indeed that ardor and vehemence which is almost inseparable from that age, makes them an easy prey to many temptations.

Now when old-age takes possession, the proud, the furious, and the wanton spirits are spent. As wine at first is mixed with dregs, until by time it settles and is refined; so the passions of youth — if they are not mortified by the grace of God — yet *they are weakened and deadened by the age of men*. As Tully has it, when pleasures have almost depraved both body and mind, then old-age comes and cures that which wisdom could not cure; and it is a happiness to be rid of such vile guests in any way.

But you will say, though one sort of sins are gone — yet others succeed in their place. It is too evident by what has been said before, that old-age has it's sins, as well as youth. The objection must be answered with tears — no age in this world without it's temptations — this *leprosy* will not be fully cleansed, until the house be taken down! But yet as we find children and youth *more* apt to breed vermin, than aged people; so there are fewer enormities in old-age, than in youth — for transgressions do generally proceed either from *ignorance* — which old-age does usually inform and heal; or from the *strength of passions* — which are much rebated and repressed in old-age.

Now the *older* a man grows — the *wiser* should he grow. And the *wiser* he grows — the less likely he is to chose evil. The more divine strokes and judgments one has seen upon evil-doers — the more he should be afraid of tampering with it. The nearer a man is to his end — the more in all reason he will beware of clogging his conscience. So that dying graces are fittest for a dying body, and a holy heart is fittest for an hoary head.

And this is a great privilege, for as much as sin is the disease of the soul, and the *greatest evil* in the world: so that that state of life, which is freest from it, must needs be the happiest. For it is this that helps to complete our felicity in heaven — that no sin lodges there. And the aged person is hastening there, and consequently strives to break this yoke of sin now, and fit himself for that heavenly estate. As the *pleasures* he has had in most sins are gone

— so his *desires* after them are gone also. He now finds that there is more satisfaction, in *not* desiring the passing pleasures of sin — than there is in enjoying of them. He is delighted at his releasement from those shackles of sin. He would not live over again his sinful life, for all the world. And he is concerned, not because most of his sins are past, but because at any time they had dominion over him.

Yes, he finds more real contentment in his penitential tears, than ever he had in his youthful frolics! With what *contempt* does he behold the debaucheries, the mirthful parties, and the frothy follies of youth, which they triumph in, as in an Heaven upon earth? But he has experienced and fathomed them, and found them as *empty* as vanity, and as *filthy* as the mire! He now believes what he had often heard — that the pleasures of sin are but like a golden dream, which leave nothing but pensiveness behind them. Now the varnish of his sin is worn off, he sees the filthy and ugly nature of it, and wonders that any rational person should ever love it. He is now frightened at the remembrance of those youthful sins, that he formerly committed without remorse. And in short, he is well pleased, that he has a *weak body* instead of his *strong corruption*. He is ready to count his old-age as his flourishing age — because he only finds his vices, and the fuel of them withered, and that his mind began now to be freed from the snares, wherein it was held by the body.

Let every aged person labor to find these blessed effects, and so be content with the fall of that house, which was continually haunted with such furies. But take heed of being only passive in this parting; these *fires* should not only go out of themselves, but should be quenched by true mortification. It is not sufficient, that sin be dead in you — but you must be dead to it. You must be active in the crucifixion of it — or else the corruption of one vice, will be the generation of another. "If you through the spirit, mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live." [Romans 8.13](#).

Section IV. The fourth privilege of old-age is, that it is MORE PRONE TO PIETY. True and solid piety is the dominion of God's fear and love in the heart of man — and exerts itself in the constant practice of all the duties of religion in a conscientious manner. For in religion there is a body and a soul. The body of it consists in the form of godliness; the *soul* of it, is that which animates all the outward acts, and is fitly called the *power* of godliness. For the activity and force of anything proceeds from the soul, or inward principle. Now the separating this form and power of godliness, like as that of the soul and body, is the death of godliness. And therefore, though we prefer the soul, or inside of religion — yet we divorce it not from the body: but do take piety in it's just latitude, comprehending the acts of devotion, from a right *principle*, in a right *manner*, and to a right *end*; and expressing itself in a sober, righteous, and godly life.

To this serious piety, old-age has a greater propensity, than any other age of man. Inasmuch as we find many in Scripture, and other stories bent for Heaven in their declining years — who in the former parts of their lives minded nothing but the world and the flesh. They whom no persuasions, no ordinances, no afflictions could fully bring them to the obedience of Christ — yet the lively sense and feeling of their own decay, and of their approach to the eter

nal judgment — obliges them to true repentance, and to make their calling and election sure.

So that it has passed for an observation, that those who are not handsome at twenty, strong at thirty, wise at forty, rich at fifty, pious at sixty — are never likely to be handsome, or strong, or wise, or rich, or pious ever. When any man is warned out of the house he lives in, laying aside all other unnecessary business, he sets himself to provide another habitation. Now every decay of strength and sense; every gray hair, or wrinkle — is a sensible warning that we must soon leave this earthly house. He must be strangely stupid who thinks not, in good earnest, to provide for his soul — when not only it may *suddenly*, but must *shortly* go either to Heaven or Hell.

These kind of sentiments caused that learned Grotius to profess, when he approached death, that he would gladly exchange all his learning and honor, for the plain integrity of one Jean Urick, who was a devout poor man, who spent eight hours of his time in devotion, eight in labor, and but eight in sleep and all other refreshments.

Besides, all the unruly passions being now cooled by time and years, reason obtains a fair hearing, and the Spirit of God gets a complete victory over the heart, which had resisted so long. As a city which has been long besieged, and often summoned to surrender — yet holds out until provisions begin to fail, and sees the walls terribly shaken — then it finds it high time to capitulate and surrender. Just so, almighty God calls, and cries, and knocks time after time at the sinners heart — but it is heedless of these calls — it is feasted and filled with the vanities of this present life. But when it finds all the fabric ready to fall upon it's head, and no provision made for a future and eternal state — then it is high time to be getting oil, and laying up a good foundation for the time to come.

And for those who have been pious before — yet old-age is a great incentive to greater holiness. As a man in sailing, the nearer he comes to the shore — the nearer he would be. Just so, the nearer I am to God — the nearer still I would be.

A person of years must needs have a more clear and comprehensive knowledge . . . of the doctrines and duties of Christianity, of the life of faith, of mortification of sin, of the divine precepts, of the nature and power of godliness; and having more leisure, and being somewhat retired out of the throng of worldly business — they are fitter to *recollect* these things, and to reduce them into *practice*.

And this certainly is a great privilege — to have a greater aptitude to that which is good. Alas, young people are under a great disadvantage herein: it's true, their faculties are more nimble, and their memories more fresh; but then they come into the world like raw soldiers in to the field; they are compassed and daily allured with divers temptations, and have boisterous lusts within themselves — and so they are in a more remote distance from true piety. They are like an unruly colt in a large and fat pasture — there's no coming near them, until t

hey are driven into a corner, until their way is hedged up with thorns, and then you may catch them.

Such is the fate of young people, they are born like a wild donkey's colt, [Job. 11.12](#). They care not for anything that's pious, they fear not any evil, adding iniquity unto iniquity — until it come to hoary hair, and their arms and legs begin to fail them; and *then* the voice of God will be heard, and his counsel shall be followed.

So though old-age of itself, will not bring a man to Heaven — yet it will fit a man for it, it removes the obstacles of repentance, and promotes the exercises of religion.

And it is high time it should be so; their activity for this world is past, if they do not grow active for eternity — they will be good for nothing. They cannot work, O but they can read and fast and pray — and that's far better. The aged person remembers, that he is going into a holy world, and labors to have on earth some *suitableness* to the life of Heaven; because men begin their Heaven or Hell upon earth. And old age fits his purpose, being proper for *mortification* and *meditation*. The more knowledge, and holiness he arrives at here on earth — the riper and fitter he is for that place to which he is ready to go.

Let every aged person then, endeavor to verify this privilege by their solid piety in all the instances thereof. Let there be a principle of *holiness* within, and the *practice* of it without, in all of life, for the hoary head a crown of glory — *when* it is found in the way of righteousness, [Proverbs 16.31](#).

Section 5. The fifth privilege of old-age is, that it is RIPER IN ITS FRUITS, than a

ny	other	age.	That	is,		
their	<i>judgments</i>	are	more	refined,		
their	<i>passions</i>	are	more	sedate,		
their	<i>graces</i>	are	more	strong,		
their	<i>actions</i>	are	more	regular	and	uniform,

and their *spiritual stature* is taller.

This may be gathered from the apostle, [1 Corinthians 13.11](#). "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." The words and the thoughts then of an aged experienced man must, by a just inference, be very solid and weighty. Every man must needs observe the rawness of his younger conceptions, and the lightness of his former assertions. Yes the Psalmist expressly tells us that "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon. Planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green!" [Psalm 92:12-14](#)

And to this do other authors and experience bear witness. Trace some aged godly men from morning to night, you shall still find them (human and unavoidable infirmities excepted) .

so	discreet	in	their	charity,
so	grave	in	their	counsels,

so savory in their discourse,
so constant in their piety,
so considerate in their resolutions,
so faithful in their reproofs,
so poised in their temper,
so charitable in their censures, and
so uniform and useful in their lives —
that their practice may be a perpetual sermon, and copy to teach others their duty to God and man. So that it was no small title of honor, which was given to Mnason — that he was *an old disciple*.

And there is a rational account to be given of this; seeing the aged person has had time and means to sift and weigh all worldly notions, to observe the frailties both of himself and others, to distinguish realities from appearances, and

to penetrate through the surface — into the substance of temporal and spiritual. They have passed through all relations, and having been children and parents, husbands or wives for a long time, and many of them servants and masters — they are hereby enabled both to speak and to act in all cases, with the greater solidity and efficacy.

Add to this, that their long acquaintance with God cannot but assimilate them unto him, and make their fruits holy, just, and good.

Let observation be made, and it will be commonly found, that the discourses, the sermons, the books which proceed from people of long years, though they may lack the external ornaments and ardor which are usual with younger people — yet have that congruity, weight, and wisdom that raise their value, and render them more truly useful. So we may well say in this case, that *the best wine is reserved to the last!*

Now this is a valuable privilege. For who does not rather chose the fruit that is *ripe* — than that which is raw? If it is not to some palates more toothsome — yet it is to all people more wholesome. Summer fruit may be more luscious, but winter (old-age) fruit is more solid, and will keep longer. The stony ground were those who received the word with joy, but having no root, they soon withered. But the good ground were those who kept the word, and brought forth fruit with patience. And that which puts a value upon these ripe and well digested fruits, is that they tend more eminently to the glory of God. Hereby they show forth the virtues, and so the praises of him who has called them. And they do more largely conduce to the good of all who have occasion to use them, or are conversant with them.

To which purpose Plutarch observes, that as those who teach music, do by their own singing, direct their scholars. So those who would instruct young men in private or public affairs, must not only outwardly dictate good *axioms* and *rules* to them — but by their own steady course in word and deed, endeavor to frame their minds to *virtue*. There is an incredible charm in *example*, and thereby a godly man is a common blessing.

Let all you aged people then, consider what *fruits* you bring forth. It does not befit you to be naive in what you *hear*, nor rash in what you *speak*, nor hasty in what you *do*. Whatever savors of youth, is inappropriate in you. You must study to live as *patterns* — you should do more than others. Those who have been long at a trade, should be accurate in it. The apostle puts much upon the time, [Hebrews 5.12](#): When for the time you ought to be teachers, etc. you have been long in Christ's school, you should be perfect in the rules of Christian life! Those who had received five talents, will not be accepted, unless they gain five more. If your figs are not good, very good — it is probable they will be bad, very bad. If an aged person be not ripe for Heaven, let him take heed he is not ripe for Hell.

Section VI. The sixth privilege of old-age is, that it is WORTHIER OF RESPECT, than those of an inferior age. I mean hereby, both an inward reverence, and the external expression thereof — and the former is and ought to be the foundation of the latter. An aged person, even on that account, though neither rich nor wise, though neither noble nor pious — yet deserves a respect for the antiquity of his being. The veneration due to them is founded on the law of nature. Hence Plato appoints that everyone should honor the aged both in word and deed, and this he often repeats.

All the disputes about the *antiquity*, and consequently the dignity of families or cities is grounded on this foundation. Why should monuments, old coins, yea even of ruins be regarded — and not old men and old women? This is also directly enjoyed in the fifth commandment, where by father and mother that are to be honored. Divines do rightly determine, that such as are elders by age, as well as those who are so by relation and office, are intended. *Honor* in that precept means an inward esteem, and reverence in the heart, and the same expressed by a suitable behavior towards them, in word and deed.

And this is expressly specified in [Levit. 19.32](#), "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly — and fear your God. I am the Lord." The Jews indeed had a tradition hereupon, that it was not only fit to rise, when an aged person was passing by us, but that we should rise up, when they were four cubits distance from us; and then we should presently sit down again, thereby to manifest that we rose up in honor to them. But the plain scope of that command is only, that *we ought to make all due expression of respect to the aged*. And the indefiniteness of the precept shows, that it is due to *all* who are aged; even that pale and wrinkled face challenges a regard. And the fear of God is joined with it — as you fear God, honor the aged. And because the young, the rich, and the proud will be reluctant to stoop herein — therefore he adds, "I am the lord," whose authority is unquestionable, and whose will is the highest reason, who will reward the keepers of this law, and punish the breakers of it.

Agreeable to this is that, [Proverbs 23.22](#), "Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old." Likewise, [1 Timothy 5.1, 2](#). "Never speak harshly to an older man, but appeal to him respectfully as you would to your own father. Treat older women as you would your mother."

Accordingly it is threatened as a sore judgment, when the child shall behave himself proudly against the old, [Isaiah 3.5](#), "Young people will insult their elders, and vulgar people will sneer at the honorable." And we have a comment upon this in a heathen poet, who tells us that they held it for a wickedness worthy to be expiated by death, if one that was young did not rise, to show respect to one that was old. Upon all which it is apparent, that there is a *special respect and reverence* due to old-age.

Now let us consider what *privilege* there is herein. This respect is chiefly valuable for its use. For hereby the aged person is fenced from contempt, unto which he is liable enough through his feebleness, poverty, and infirmities. And any sincere man had rather die with comfort — than live in contempt. But principally, they are hereby preserved in a capacity of doing some good — their example, their instructions, their reproofs, and their advice will become significant.

We generally value men's judgments and determinations according to the people that give them. Great care they should have how they advise, and a great deference should be given to their advice. So the apostle, [1 Peter 5.5](#), "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders." And hereupon I would exhort and charge all young people who shall cast their eyes on these papers, to remember their place and duty, to deny themselves, their own desires and conceits, and to honor their seniors. They were praying, perhaps before you had a being; they had done God and their country good service, before you had done one stroke of work. Holy Paul laid something upon seniority in grace, [Romans 16.7](#), "Andronicus and Junia, who were in Christ before me." And by the like reason, it is some dignity to be in the world before others.

Away then with that unChristian, yes unmanly, and unmannerly pertness and disrespect too frequent everywhere towards aged people. Instead whereof reckon it to your good breeding, yes charge it upon your conscience, to give honor to whom honor is due.

Section 7. The seventh privilege of old-age is, that they are FURTHER FROM THE WORLD than younger people are. The young are in the midst of the world, and of all its troubles and temptations. But the aged have traveled through them, and are now almost past them.

There are two things in the world that make it uneasy — sin and suffering. Sin makes the world uneasy to godly men — suffering makes the world uneasy to all men.

A godly man has contracted a deep hatred against sin — and yet he cannot be rid of it. He meets with it in every place; among the looser sort of people it swarms; he sees and hears that every day which vexes his righteous soul; and returning home he finds it in his own heart, and that grieves him most. He is chained to a body of death without any remedy; and the more knowledge and grace he has — the more he hates sin, and abhors himself by reason of it. Sin meets him in every employment, in every prayer, and vexes him at the heart. He is like a man who lives by a bad neighbor, or who is yoked to a contrary wife — they cannot live comfortably with them, and cannot live possibly without them. Hence he cries out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!"

Now the *young* person is in the midst of these *Philistines*. The corruption of his nature meeting with the temptations of the world — is as sparks to the dry tinder — too easily set on fire with lust, anger, gluttony, and such like; with which he must be either in continual and sharp conflict, or else miserably ruined.

Now the *aged* person has gotten many victories in this spiritual warfare, whereby his enemies are grown weaker, and he bolder and stronger. He knows this warfare will not last long, and sees the reward of his victory, and so pleases himself with his condition. This made the apostle, when aged, to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the *crown of righteousness*, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day." [2 Timothy 4:7-8](#). And is not this a privilege? Would he accept a new lease to live over his life again? Not for the whole world. Seneca could say, "If I might return into my youth again, I would earnestly refuse it. I would never yield, when I have almost run my whole race, to return back to the beginning again."

And for the sufferings in the world; man whether he be born to a rich estate or not — yet is born unto *troubles* as the sparks fly upward. We meet them in every stage of our life. *We come into the world with cries — and go out with groans*. And a great part of the space between, is replenished with sighs, and cares, and troubles. Some inflicted by the hand of God, and some by the hand of man. One is afflicted with pain or sickness upon the body, another is afflicted with poverty, or losses in our estates. Some are wounded in their reputations, and some are afflicted with an unhappy life, or untimely death of our relations. Yes even if we escape these, and have a perpetual sunshine — yet the cares and troubles that attend *prosperity* are not few nor small.

When God surveyed the world at first, he pronounced all was good. But when the wisest of men had made his survey of the world since the fall, he pronounced all things in it to be vanity and vexation of spirit. And the aged Christian can conclude by his own experience, that the world is a sea of storms, a sink of sins, and a very prison to the soul.

Indeed the world is a stage whereon we have opportunity to honor God, and do some service to our fellow-creatures. But otherwise the best notion of it, is only *a convenient inn for pilgrims in their journey*. And upon this account we ought to be *content* while we are in it — and very well content to be released out of it. For what wise man but is glad to part with the most convenient inn — to be going towards his own home? Alas, those who are old have seen so much of the falseness of the world, of the deceits of men, of the divisions of the church, of the weakness of godly men, and of the wickedness of evil men — that they are sick of this world, and could not be hired with all it can give, to abide in it one day after their work is done. When a man has found something above, beyond, and after this poor world — he is truly weary of it.

So that the privilege of aged people who are even passed the world, is really great. They have escaped those rocks and gulfs, of which younger people are yet in danger. They may look back with pity on younger people, who are to grapple with the difficulties which they have overcome. They have also attained that, which all young men desire — for these would live long, and the aged have lived long. They have seen an end of all perfection, and that is a poor perfection that has an end. And after all they find that this poor world is not their rest, because it is polluted.

Although they have been crucifying the world a long time, yet they cannot make it wholesome enough to feed on, without much caution and jealousy. And finding it *so dangerous a master*, and *so troublesome a servant* — they are glad to be rid of it, and glad that they are near parting from it.

He who has *tried* the world, and yet *loves* it — is *bewitched* by it. As a man that has surfeited on anything, his stomach rises against it: so is it with the aged, they have too long surfeited on it, and now their hearts rise against it! The world and they are easily parted, for it cares little for them, and they care less for it. Farewell (think they) you false and flattering world, that promised me contentment — and never performed it; that pretended to be my good friend — and have proved my constant snare, my deadly enemy. I am now going to a peaceable holy and endless world.

Hence it was that when the physicians once told holy Mr. Dod, in a dangerous sickness in his old-age, that they had good hope of his recovery; he answered them, "that the news pleased him no better, than if one should tell the weather-beaten mariner that was pulling into the haven, that he must turn back to conflict with the storms again." No certainly, those who are almost got safely through this dangerous world, would be reluctant to venture into it again!

Indeed if a man has no portion but in this life, if he has no house but Hell to go to when he leaves the world — then it is no wonder if he is reluctant to part with it. But those who are dead to this world, and ripe for Heaven, would not live here always, but rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave, [Job 3.22](#). And this leads me to,

Section VIII. The eighth privilege of old-age, which is, that it is nearer to death than younger people are, and consequently if they are in Christ, NEARER TO THE EVERLASTING LIFE. Though it is possible for the young to die soon — yet it is impossible for the aged to live long. Their manifest decays are a certain forecast of their approaching dissolution. No medicine has yet been found to cure old-age. The graves are ready for them, and the worms wait for their meal upon them. The moth of mortality, which is bred in our nature, will still be fretting the garment of our bodies, until they are consumed. Death is already got into the aged person's eye and ear — and in a short time will bring him unto the dust.

Now though death is an unwelcome messenger to those who live at ease — yet to a holy old man and woman, it is a blessed privilege. For as looking backward they see a tempting troublesome world — so looking forward they see a state of perfect holiness and happiness

repared for them. The end of their fight, is the beginning of their victory. As they part from their earthly labors, they take possession of their heavenly honors. And does not any apprentice rejoice, when the time of his service is near its expiration?

I know nature recoils at the approach of death in the best, but faith is then of greatest need and use, and the just may be said to die, as well as to live by his faith. Thereby he sees life and immortality just before him, and only one more weary step to pass, and then he is well. Indeed the idle man desires not to go to bed. But to all that suffer pain — an end of pain is sweet. The traveler gladly beholds his inn. The hireling often computes when his year is out. The gardener greedily expects harvest. The pregnant woman waits for her expected deliverance. And the aged person waits for his summons *home*.

One would wonder what shift even the heathen made to render death desirable, who had such weak glimmerings of an after-life. And yet even they would thus argue: death, either it *annihilates* us — or else *transforms* us. Annihilation will but reduce me into the state wherein I was; and if it transforms me, it will put me into better lodgings. My soul can be nowhere so penned up, as here it is in the body. What boast would they have made of death, had they but firmly believed everlasting life?

For this it was which enabled the apostle to make this expression, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far!" [Philippians 1:23](#). For where should the spouse desire to be, but with her husband? Or where the members desire to be, but with the head? And upon this account, that godly Lady Falkland would usually say when she was going to bed, "Now am I one day nearer Heaven than ever I was!"

The aged person sees a woeful wilderness behind him, and the blessed land of promise before him, and therefore no wonder that, with Moses, he longs to be in it. And the nearer the holy soul approaches its perfection, the more earnest and almost impatient it is to attain it.

And one great advantage of the aged lies in this: that the meditation on death, which is the *best* in view, is of great use to compose the mind, to keep us in the fear of the Lord all the day long, to keep our consciences void of offence towards God and men, to work in us a great contempt of the world, and a singular freedom of spirit and of speech. It will make us neither much to fear, nor much to hope, or desire anything, which the world can do for us, or against us. And finally meditation on death does greatly conduce, to keep us steady and constant in faith and holiness.

And if some aged people do not make this use of their approaching dissolution, what would they or others do, if they did not grow old at all? What a careless worldly and vain life would men live, if they had no certain indications of their dying? Surely the nearer to Heaven, the more heavenly we should be: as any man when he is come to the confines of another country, will frame himself to the guise thereof, so he who has this hope in him, does purify himself as he is pure, and will begin the life below, which he expects to live above.

And the other privilege herein contained is this, that being weary, they are near to their journey's end. They have been long tossed upon the sea, and now they see the haven, and rej

oice that they are ready to put into it. Not that a godly man should desire to die for ease, only to be freed from the troubles of life: all the tribulations of that blessed apostle Paul, never made him cry out, "O wretched man that I am!" But his body of death forced him to it. But while we carry these earthly tabernacles about us, even the sufferings of this present time will make us rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Especially when we behold that innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the first born, the spirits of just men made perfect, yes God the judge of all, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, among whom we are going to reside in perfect bliss. Then will our heart and our flesh cry out, "O when shall we come and appear before God!"

And this is the privilege of old-age, that there is but one feeble life between them and a crown; and you know that he who is shortly to be invested in some dignity, feasts himself with the hopes of it. *Yes this is the constant relief of the aged man under all his bodily, and other temporal afflictions — that they will last but for a moment.* Hold out faith and patience — the jubilee is at hand.

Therefore it behooves all that are in years, to lay up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life: to get unquestionable evidence of their right to the tree of life, of their part in paradise — and then their thoughts of what's beyond death, will support them against all events on this side it, or in it.

That death is never to be dreaded, which is followed with immortality. All your riches, reputation, or friends will then nothing comfort you, like a lively sense of Christ in you, the hope of glory. He who has lived *for* God, will cheerfully *go* to him; and those who have run with difficulty, will die with ease.

And thus you have an account of some of the many privileges of old-age.

Besides all these, it is a privilege to attain to such an age, as that we may ourselves see to the education, and disposal of our children; and also to have the comfort of their piety and prosperity. Hereupon it is recorded as the crown of the blessings bestowed upon Job, after his restoration, that he lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons sons, even four generations, [Job 42.16](#).

From all which we may conclude, that although every age of man's life has its peculiar bitterness and sweetness — yet all things well weighed, a quiet and honest old-age is to be preferred before any other age. So that though we commonly say, that everything is worse for its age — yet a pious old person is the better; and therefore no man needs to be, as too many are, ashamed of their gray hairs.

Forasmuch as old-age is . . .
greater in authority than any other age,
richer in experience than any other age,
freer from sin than any other age,
more prone to piety than any other age,
riper in its fruits than any other age,
worthier of respect than any other age,

further from the world than any other age,
and nearer to eternity than any other age.

And so much for the privileges of old-age, which is the sixth point to be handled.

Chapter 7. The WORK of Old-age.

In the seventh and last place, I've come to treat, concerning the *work* and *business* of old-age. What special and proper employment, besides their necessary and ordinary affairs, does their years oblige the elderly unto? Their laboring and traveling days are done, but yet they have much work to do. Since they have not yet apprehended, this one thing they must do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are ahead, pressing towards the mark. There is no complete rest for the body on this side of the grave; nor for the soul, on this side Heaven. Those who were idle in the eleventh hour, were checked by, "Why do you stand here idle all day?" [Matthew 20:6](#). You have been busy a great while for a time, it is but reasonable that you should take some pains for eternity. The shadows of the evening have overtaken you. You have but a little time to work in.

It was wise counsel of the wise man who said; "Whatever your hands find to do — do it with all your might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, to which you are going" [Ecclesiastes 9:10](#). Behold and see how fast the sands of your hourglass are running; hearken how fast the pendulum of your clock hastens. The weekly obituaries always contain some who die of age; and which week your name will be called, you know not — but when it is called, you must go, no bail is taken by *Sergeant Death*. Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he comes, finds so doing. To use the Prophet Joel's words, [Joel 1:2](#), "Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land!" Hear the word of exhortation, and buckle in sober sadness to these employments of old-age.

Section I. The first work of old-age, is REPENTANCE of your sins. This is a bitter pill to flesh and blood, but it must be swallowed here or hereafter. When it is tasted here — it is only bitter-sweet, there is comfort in it, there is comfort after it. It is like the pains of a woman in travail, the remembrance of the loving husband supports her at present, and the birth of a lovely child revives her after.

But if repentance is deferred, and placed on the wrong side of death — then it will be bitter, very bitter; there is no present, no future comfort. Then it will be like the gnawing pains of a woman with a cancer, though infinitely sharper, and infinitely longer. So that it is not referred to the old-man, or any man else, whether he will repent or not, for repentance cannot be avoided; but whether he will repent for a time — or repent forever. Whether he will repent with hope — or repent with despair.

Now repentance may be considered, in a double respect:

1. Initially, at the first conversion of the soul to God; and
2. Secondly, in the continuing life of the believer. It concerns aged people to be acquainted respectively with both. This needful message then is directed,

1. To such aged people, who are yet in the state of unrenewed nature; who have never passed through the new birth, nor know anything by experience of regeneration. This was the

case of old Nicodemus, though a master in Israel, [John 3:9](#). Now that a fundamental repentance or conversion, call it how you will, is necessary to all who shall be saved, I should think is past dispute. For it cannot be denied, that we come into the world in a sinful state and it is manifest that baptism does not cure the soul of that disease; but that all people in general have a strong propensity either to the lusts of the flesh, or to the lusts of the eyes, or to pride of life, until an inward change is wrought in the heart; which is effectual calling of a careless sinner, to turn to God and godliness. Now if an aged person has been a stranger to this grace of repentance, though perhaps he has led a sober, industrious, just, yes a charitable life, and also has complied with the outward acts of devotion — yet except the *tree* has been made good by regeneration, it cannot have its *fruit* unto holiness, nor the end everlasting life.

I would therefore implore all such unconverted aged people, to apply themselves with all speed and seriousness to this first repentance; to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, to get new hearts and new spirits — or else infallibly you must die. Say not with Nicodemus, "how can a man be born when he is old?" For the work is possible and the method is plain. Harder it may be for an old man to become a new man, than for the younger. For that the faculties of the soul are enfeebled, and *the habits of sin strengthened by continuance*. Former guilt and negligence, makes men to doubt of future assistance or acceptance. But since God does call aged people to repent, since he has spared you alive up until now, and to those who are living, there is hope; since there be innumerable instances of old converts. In fine, since God looks upon men, and if any, mark, if any say, "I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not;" he will deliver him from going down to the pit, [Job 33:27-28](#).

Never question the possibility, but set about the work. Set the necessity against the difficulty. *It is turn in time — or burn in eternity!* For the God of truth has said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of Heaven." How can you imagine that a limb of the devil, should become a member of Christ a child of wrath become a child of God — but by regeneration? Outward reformation may shave the hair, but this leprosy must be cured inwardly.

O lay to heart the long time you have lived in sin, and in enmity to God; the short time you have to live in the world; that death makes no converts, and sickness but a few. Consider what mercies and deliverances you have received from this good God — and how little true service you have done him; and whether it is not now high time to turn unto him with your whole heart and sincerely. If that holy man would not be in an unregenerate state but one hour for all the world, left he should die in that hour — then what is your pillow, or rather your heart made of, that you can sleep so long in a state of condemnation? To be born in sin is sad — but to live and die in sin, will prove a thousand times worse! Remember that the destroying angels began at the aged men! [Ezekiel 9:6](#).

It is true: Late repentance is seldom true — but yet true repentance is never too late. O the n lay all business aside, and set yourselves about repenting. Now or never — now and ever. If you turn the deaf ear unto God now, beware lest he deny you either the space, or the grace to repent hereafter. Take warning by that penitent in story, who had often determined to begin his amendment from some eminent time, as the first day of the year, or his birthda

y, that so his repentance might have some remarkable date; but when that time came, he was ready to adjourn it until another time, who thereupon concluded, that he would make that present day, though it were obscure in the calendar — yet memorable to his soul by his turning, through divine assistance, unto God.

Do you not perceive how you are in danger to be trapped by Satan, who suggested to you in the time of youth, that repentance was then too early — and who will now persuade you that it is too late? You have erred this work long enough already, now you must use double diligence about it. You are late in the vineyard, you must work the harder. The whole business of your life up until now stands for nothing; if you be not newborn, you will cease to be in this world, before you begin to live. If your death comes before your repentance, you will curse the day of your birth to all eternity.

Now for your direction in this great work, your present business is to get a competence of knowledge in the doctrines of Scripture and then searching your own hearts to compare them with the holy Law of God. For example, look at your face in the looking-glass of that hundred and nineteenth Psalm, or of the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Matthew. And then fix your mind upon the wrath of God hanging over all people in your condition, and upon the sufficient atonement made by Jesus Christ for all that believe and repent, and apply all this to your selves. Frequent the serious preaching of Gods Word, and begin to pray in good earnest, "turn me O God and I shall be turned!" And be assured, that Spirit who inclines you to the use of these means, will breath life into your dead and dry bones, and make you new creatures.

In case you find yourselves at a loss in this affair, repair to some able and faithful minister of Christ, and be not afraid or ashamed to lay open your condition, and follow his guidance therein. For if men are not content, in case of an infirmity of body, to hear the medical lectures, or to read books on health, but will state their own case to the physician himself — how much more need have you of a godly divine, to direct and assist you in an affair, wherein body and soul are at stake, and that for eternity?

And so much for that first and fundamental repentance, so absolutely necessary for such aged people, as have spent their lives in the service of the world, and the flesh, and were never truly converted unto God.

But besides these, daily repentance is a proper and necessary work for all aged people. You have lived a long time, and through omissions and commissions have contracted abundance of guilt. Trace yourselves therefore from place to place, from one period of your life to another, and strictly reckon with yourselves. Study the Ten Commandments in their true extent; they are called *Ten Words* — but they command ten thousand duties, and forbid ten thousand sins, many whereof you have ten thousand times failed in, and in many of them with great aggravations; and then sit down and cry out, "O that my head were a fountain, and my eyes rivers of tears, to bewail these offenses against a gracious God."

Upon this account did holy Augustine in his old-age write his *confessions*; wherein he makes no difficulty to shame himself, that he might give glory to God. And the Book of Ecclesiastes is judged to be the penitential writing of King Solomon in his old-age; wherein he plainly

confesses his vanity, in seeking for happiness in a vain and vexatious world, and warns all young men to beware of such like folly.

Alas if you had sinned but seven times a day — yet in seventy years those sins would have amounted unto almost two hundred thousand offences — and can you reflect upon this without amazement? No it is a wonder that we do not weep out our eyes for very griefs. When the leaves are fallen from the trees, as is aptly observed by one, the birds nests are easily seen, which were invisible before. Just so, when through age our frothy vanities are withered, we may palpably discover, the sallies of pride, wantonness and folly; yes those nest of vermin and vipers which replenished our youthful days!

Blessed be God who has appointed this remedy, and the blood of Christ without which all our tears could not wash out one sin, that poor sinners have this means of recovery, when they have been undone by sin! When we have eaten so much of the *forbidden fruit* in our youth — we have need of this *worm-wood* in our old-age. Renew therefore daily the acts of sincere repentance, and take account duly of yourselves, as some of the very heathens have done, since you must give account to God very shortly; and he who daily reckons with himself, will have but one day to reckon for, when he comes to die.

But be sure you mistake not the *nature of repentance*. For it is not only a trouble, an anger, a sorrow; but it is made up of grief and hatred; grief for the offense to God — and hatred of the sins we grieve for. *Repentance is a turning to God from all sin, with grief for it and hatred of it*. The best proof you can give of your repentance for the sins of your youth, is a watchful care against the sins of your old-age; otherwise, your sins are not forsaken, but changed.

In spite of all, if your repentance is sound — it is attended with a will and endeavor to make *restitution*, wherein you have injured any in their souls, bodies, names, or estates. This will be as testimonial letters of the truth of your repentance; you must not, no, you cannot be quiet, if your repentance is sound, until you have seriously endeavored, as far as in you lies, to recover the souls, to restore the bodies, to heal the reputations, and to repair the estates, which you have injured: without which, there can be no true repentance on earth, and without which, there will be no remission in Heaven.

Section 2. Another work of old-age is, obtaining ASSURANCE of salvation. I mean hereby, not only a *general* certainty, that some good people shall be saved; for the devils believe this, and rage at. Nor that assurance which may come by special and extraordinary revelation, since we find few or no examples in Scripture of such a thing; but rather that the apostle Paul himself grounds his assurance of the crown, upon the righteousness of God, which he extends to all those who love Christ's appearing, [2 Timothy 4:8](#). Neither do I mean a conjectural hope of salvation, which admits both of anxiety and of slavish fear; for the Scripture represents it by faith, and full assurance, and produces earnestness and seals for confirmation. Nor lastly, is this assurance confined to grace at present, but extends to final salvation. Thus the apostle, in [2 Timothy 1:12](#) says, "I know *whom* I have believed"; there is assurance of his present state, but was he certain of his perseverance? Yes, that follows and "I

am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day".

That such assurance *has* been attained, is clear enough from the instances of [Job 19:25-26](#). Of David, [Psalm 16:9-10](#). Of Paul, [2 Timothy 4:7-8](#); and many others. That it *may* be attained, is as clear; since there is no intimation that these, or the rest, had any extraordinary discovery thereof unto them, but arrived thereat in the use of those means unto which we have access as well as they. The apostle does expressly comprehend the generality of believers in this privilege, [2 Corinthians 5:1](#), "For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God." That it ought to be endeavored by all true Christians, is most evident from the plain commands to that purpose, [2 Peter 1:10](#), "For that reason, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." That few do labor to attain it, thinking it to be impossible or unnecessary, is to be bewailed. That many deceive themselves with a false persuasion of present grace and future glory, is manifest by Scripture and daily experience. And that it is most proper and needful for aged people, the thing itself speaks.

For you cannot deny but that you have souls, immortal souls which cannot die, but must return to God who gave them. And are these souls of so small value to be left to a hazard, to an everlasting venture? And is as evident, that this *life is uncertain*; we may say as Isaac, [Genesis 27:2](#), "Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death." And therefore it is time for us to go about this work without delay.

Children desire the time of youth, and youth longs to be at man's age, and men then would live to be old — but old-age has no further age to desired, it has none other to succeed it here, and they are wholly uncertain how long it will last; and therefore it is absolutely necessary, that they should be on sure grounds for eternity — and then *the day of death will be better than the day of their birth*.

You know how much of your life is already spent, you can see the *sands* that are run into the bottom end of the hour-glass, but the upper part is covered with a mantle, you know not how few sands are left there to run. No, you cannot but perceive, that death is approaching very near you. You are filled with wrinkles — which is a witness of your demise. For as it is observed of all men, that they are mortals, *apt* to die; so it is of all old men, that they are *about* to die. And for such to have *oil* to seek, when they should have it to *use*; evidences to *procure*, when they should have them to *produce*, is an inexcusable neglect.

Especially knowing that your last breath wafts you into an unalterable estate! You are launching into *the ocean of eternity* with no certainty whether it is eternal happiness, or eternal misery! What an anxious and uncomfortable state must this be? If you were not ignorant in your belief of future things, you would be restless in this condition. You owe your ease to your ignorance; if you were not half infidels, you would be more than half mad.

Which brings to mind the course which some eminent people among the heathen took, they dared not die sober, but drank great draughts of wine, saying, that no voluptuous person can go in his wits into an invisible eternal estate. With what poor comfort must that man die, that must cry out with that old philosopher: "I die in great doubt and know not where I a

m going; yet out the soul must go, ready or unready." Then will the careless sinner gnash his teeth for rage at his slothful and sinful life, which he has spent as a tale that is told. Then will he have time enough, to curse all the worldly business, or wicked company, that has devoured his precious time, and left his soul to shift for itself forever!

Do not we in all other cases strive to be at a point? Will *maybes* and *perhaps* satisfy us in any important human affairs? The tenant who is warned out of one house, cannot enjoy himself, until he be sure of another. The steward that was discharged of his office, [Luke 16](#), took present course to be provided of some other subsistence. The poorest man is uneasy, when his old suit of clothes is worn out, until he has a new one. What then are your souls dreaming of, which find the garment of the body quite worn out, your earthly house ready to fall upon its head — and yet sleep quiet only with some weak ungrounded hopes of endless happiness? Have you left your outward estates under no better assurance? You will be found at last to be wise in trifles — and fools in the things of greatest importance. Yes, you will see, when friends and relations will leave you, your estates and pleasures leave you, life itself leave you — that those who make not sure of Heaven, are sure of nothing.

Think not, that your outward blessings are any certain arguments of God's love to you; that, because God has done much for you in this world — he will therefore crown you in eternity. Or because you have lived long here in the day of his patience, that you must live always with him in Heaven. No, no, [Job 21:7-20](#) says even the wicked live, become old, yes, and are mighty in power; yet his eyes shall see his destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the almighty. Many a man has been strangely saved from death — who will not be saved at last from Hell.

Be advised therefore to set about this needful work, with all possible speed and care. To that end, chose out two or three Scriptures, which do most evidently describe a sanctified heart; which as [Matthew 5:2-8](#). And endeavor by the best helps you have, to know the true meaning thereof. Then compare your own hearts with them and whatever doubt you have of your conformity thereunto, examine it to the bottom. And in case of any insuperable difficulty, consult with some wise godly person. And when you have thoroughly sifted one Scripture, go to another, and another, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, your assurance may be established. And this done, betake you to your knees, and spreading these tried evidences before God, humbly beg the help of his Holy Spirit; both to clear your understanding, to guide your conscience, and to seal you up to the day of redemption.

You must also patiently wait in the use of all the means of grace, sermons, prayers and sacraments, until God's Spirit witnesses with your spirit, that you are the children of God.

Section 3. The third work of old-age, is PRAYERS and PRAISES. I do not here mean only the ordinary devotions, which I presume every good Christian uses, both old and young, and whereby indeed the soul breaths. For a true believer lives by faith — and breaths by prayer.

It is said of Luther, that he spent daily at least three hours in prayer. Holy David says, "Evening and morning and at noon will I pray, and cry aloud" [Psalm 55:17](#). Yes, in his old-age we

may conclude, that he died with a prayer in his mouth, from [Psalm 72](#). The prayers (and probably the life) of David the son of Jesse are ended together. The Egyptian hieroglyphic of an aged person was a *swan*, whom they imagined to die singing. For there is no *music* so sweet in the ears of God, as hearty prayers and praises.

If you find yourselves unable to hold out in the more stated and solemn PRAYERS, you should be more frequent and fervent in shorter addresses; for it is not the *length*, but the *strength* of a prayer that matters to God. You may and should abound in *holy short prayers*, or *short elevations* of the soul to God; sometimes by way of *confession*, sometimes by way of *admiration*, sometimes by way of *petition*, and sometimes by way of *thanksgiving* — of all which there are various instances in Scripture. And these you may dart upward, as you sit by the fire, as you lie in your beds, as you put your clothes on and off. Thus you may pray without ceasing, [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#). The Lord will accept of these, coming from a sincere and holy heart, which in its present circumstances can do no better. But still prayer is the proper province of the aged person.

For as was noted before, your laboring and traveling days are done — your hands and feet have done their work. The best service you can now do is upon your *knees*. There you may do much — therein you may engage God who can do all. Nothing can stand before the prayer of faith. Therefore, when you reflect upon the sins, the slips and falls in the course of your life, so that your hearts begin to ache and faint for fear, then enter into your closet, and pour out your hearts before God, and that will revive you.

When that coward Satan sets upon an aged man or woman, with his assault and battery, either to weaken their faith, or to unravel their repentance, or to cloud their comforts — their only course is to run to God by prayer; God is a refuge for us. When we feel the decays of nature, and are almost overwhelmed with distempers or troubles — then let us by prayer cast our burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain us. "Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come." [Psalm 71:17-18](#)

Here the aged shall do well not only to plead their own cause with God, but to lay up a stock for posterity, that the generations yet unborn may be the better for them. Thus David, in [Psalm 72:1](#), "Give your judgments to the king, O God, and your righteousness to the king's son", etc. What you are now sowing, may be reaped by your posterity hundreds of years afterwards.

So also you should be instant with the Lord for His church, His truth, and His gospel. So was David, [Psalm 122](#). So was Paul, always in every prayer of his. We cannot better approve ourselves to be members of that mystical body, than by our incessant prayers for the increase, the unity and the happiness thereof.

When you are thinking of your country, of your kindred, and of your friends, add a holy prayer for a blessing upon them. These are employments fit for a Christian aged person, and will befit them better than endless complaints, or groundless worries. You may do yourselves,

the church, the nation, and posterity more service by your fervent prayers, than you have done by the cares and labors of your whole life.

Then, for PRAISES; when you consider all the good which God has done *in* you, the good he has done *for* you, and the good he has done *by* you — you cannot surely be silent. Reflect upon your own hearts, and remember what a plight you were in, when his grace and mercy saved you; what methods he has used to save you; what light and love and life he has bestowed upon you; what outward means and inward motions he has given you; how he has rescued you out of various temptations, recovered you out of sad relapses, established you in times of trial and defection, and brought you within sight of the promised land.

Then review your whole life, and consider what great things he has done for you. Observe old David's course in [Psalm 71:6](#), "By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother's womb; My praise is continually of You." Remember the care he took of your education, the wonderful preservations in your childhood, and youth, when your rashness and folly did every day precipitate you into palpable dangers; how many sicknesses and distempers he has either prevented or healed; in how many journeys and voyages he has protected you on; in what perils by day and by night, by land and by sea he has preserved you. O remember the works of the Lord, surely you should remember his wonders of old, [Psalm 77:11](#).

How many lives have you had given you? How many thousands have been cut off — and you have been spared? What a wonder is it, that your eyes and limbs have been kept safe so long! Now you are weak — but remember how long you were strong. Now you cannot eat, or sleep, but you have forgotten the cheerful meals, and restful nights you have enjoyed in the past years.

In respect of your outward estate, remember how you came naked into the world, how the Lord has fed you all your life long. He it is who has given you power to get wealth, He has still spread your table, and filled your cup, and more than ever you *expected*, at the least *deserved*. Remember how merciful He has been unto you in every way. Then conclude with David, [2 Samuel 7:18](#), "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me hitherto?" "My mouth shall show forth your righteousness and your salvation, for I know not the numbers thereof. I will hope continually, and will praise you more and more." [Psalm 71:14-15](#). Let Hallelujah be your song, as was the motto of godly Mr. Bruen, which he wrote in the first leaf of all his books. Let not your present weakness and pain, bury your sense of all your former health and ease. *A thankful life is a pleasant life.*

Lastly review the good that God has done *by* you, that still God may have all the praise. You have wrestled with God in prayer — though now you are soon faint and weary. You have measured many a step to hear God's word preached — though now you cannot. You have read many a good book — though now your eyes are very dim. Many a soul has been the be

ter for your counsel, and many affections have been refreshed by your relief. Now as God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, so your remembrance of it in this your old-age, must oblige you to renewed thanks and praise. Thus David in that [Psalm 18](#), which he spoke unto the Lord, when he was delivered out of the hands of all his enemies, touches all these topics or heads of mercies and then cries out, "The Lord lives, blessed be my rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted! It is God that therefore will I give thanks unto you, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto your name!" Thus will you conjoin the life of Heaven and earth; you will end your lives with that work, with which you will begin your everlasting life.

Section 4. The fourth work of old-age is, INSTRUCTION OF THE YOUNGER. God has in great wisdom lodged His various gifts in divers subjects, that there may be a mutual dependence one upon another, and a mutual helpfulness of each to others. Thus he entrusts the *young* with strength to support and aid the elder, whose strength is decayed. And thus he entrusts the *aged* with knowledge and wisdom to guide the younger, whose judgment is yet unripe.

As it is a great misery, when the aged are not relieved by the strength and industry of those who are young — so it is a great infelicity, when the aged are either unable or unwilling to instruct, or when those who are young are too careless or conceited to receive instruction. That is therefore a barbarous precept in the Koran, "You are not obliged to lead men the right way, God guides whom he wills." But we have better learned Christ.

The whole current of Scripture runs for this practice. Thus did *Abraham*, as we may gather from [Genesis 18:19](#). Thus *Jacob*, thus *Moses*, leaving more especially that excellent chapter, [Deuteronomy 32](#) — just before he died, for an instruction to those he left behind him. The like did *Joshua* when he was aged and about to die. So with *Samuel*, in [1 Samuel 12](#). So with *David*, in [1 Chronicles 28:9](#) to his son, "And you Solomon my son", etc. Thus did *Peter* when he was ready to put off his tabernacle, [2 Peter 1:12-13](#). The like did aged *Paul* in his epistle to Timothy, when the time of his departure was at hand, [2 Timothy 4:5-6](#). So that we have a whole cloud of witnesses, showering down their counsels and directions on the younger sort.

The aged are furnished for this employment, having ability and opportunity for such purposes. Their peculiar talent lies this way; "Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom." [Job 32:7](#). You must have a stock of observations, and your *speech* commonly is least impaired of all faculties; and it is best employed in communicating your useful notions unto others.

The sages of old, in the first part of their time, learned the mysteries of their religion; in the second, they produced them into practice; in the third, they taught them unto others.

One end of our learning anything, is that we may instruct others. And the heathen thought, that the greatest part of our time should be devoted to the common good. Hide not therefore your talent in a napkin, but produce your stock, and without impoverishing yourselves, enrich those who need it. You have opportunity, you have your children and grandchildren ab

out you, you have some authority with them — let your words drop as the dew, and let your lips feed many. What profit have they by your longevity, if you further them not in godliness? In short, our lives are little worth, when they are not useful; and we cannot better bestow them, than in making others better.

And here is a large field to walk in. You should be able and ready to instruct the younger in the WORD of God, in the doctrine of the gospel, in that great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. They should be familiarly opened by you at home. You should talk of them, as you sit in your house, as you walk by the way, when you lay down, and when you rise up, [Deuteronomy 6:7](#). Thus *David*, "Come you children, hearken unto me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord", [Psalm 34:11](#). So also *Solomon* at large, [Proverbs 4:1-2](#), "Hear children the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding, for I give you good doctrine", etc. Thus *Timothy's mother*, yes and *grandmother* instructed him.

You are to instruct them also in the WORKS of God, both of creation and providence. Where in you may convey to them many things, tending to the glory of your maker, and the benefit of their souls. You should acquaint them with such particular instances of the wisdom, righteousness, power, and goodness of God which you have read, heard or seen! That the generation to come might know them, even the children that should be born who should arise and declare them to their children, that they might set their hope in God, and keep his commandments, [Psalm 78:6-7](#).

You can tell them also the METHODS OF SATAN, and the wicked device whereby he beguiles poor souls. A rescued slave can relate the miserable bondage, and the means of his deliverance. You can describe the intrigues of sin, and warn young people of the *deceitfulness*, and *folly* thereof — by your own experience. They who have been almost mired in a puddle or quagmire, can easily show others the place, and direct others to avoid it.

In summary, you should instruct the younger to know, and serve, and trust in God. And whatever you have observed in the course of your lives conducive thereunto, you should impart unto them. That as ungodly men do wickedly communicate their sinful acts and practices, and endeavor to propagate them unto posterity, that each generation may be worse than other — so all wise and godly men, especially when they are in years, should transmit the knowledge and practice of piety to their successors, that the next age may be better than this; and that when we are dead and gone — yet it may be truly said, the world was the better for us.

Besides these instructions in the excellent matters of religion, it lies in the power and way of many aged people, to direct and advise the younger in many useful observations otherwise as concerning the *education of their children*, and the helping of them into *employments* or *marriage*; and concerning the preservation or recovery of their *health*. In case they have any peculiar skill or are useful for the good of mankind, they ought not to bury it in their graves, but to assign it to posterity. Whatever you have learned or observed, which may be beneficial or any way useful to the church or common-wealth, to your country, town or family — all these notices you should communicate to those who are younger, with all possible fidelity and exactness. If need be, *commit them to writing* for the benefit, at least, of your own posterity. Although your instructions may not at present seem to be much regarded — y

et be not discouraged by this; for the wise counsels of the aged, like the seed of the Word of God, seems to die and to be lost — yet in process of time it revives, and brings forth fruit.

Nevertheless, there is *wisdom* to be used in the instructing of young people. For they too commonly are proud, conceited, and self-witted — so your lessons therefore must be at such seasons, and by such degrees, as may render them most valuable and welcome and must be sweetened with that love and dearness, withal interlaced with such pleasant diversion, that their appetite may not be cloyed, nor your sober advice be distasteful to them.

Finally, your EXAMPLE should be a continual instruction to young people. Those who will not heed your good *words* — yet seeing your good *works*, they will have a constant copy before them, and be induced to write after it. The objects of the eye, make a deeper impression than those of the ear. When they see the constant practice of piety and charity, prudence and patience, they conclude that your directions are in good earnest, that they are practical, that they are necessary. If your example is not godly, then what the right hand of good counsel builds up — the left hand of a loose practice will pull down.

Section 5. The fifth work of old-age is, WATCHFULNESS AGAINST YOUR SPECIAL TEMPTATIONS. For besides the above said sins, that are most usual in old-age, there are some particular weaknesses, to which they are rather tempted, than overcome; wherein if they are not watchful, they will become miserable. Such as:

1. Discontentedness of mind. This is a distemper to which old-age is very liable. They want this, and they want that, which perhaps they have had up to this time — and they cannot bear these wants. One loss or cross befalls them — and before they have well digested this, another comes. One while this disease or pain afflicts them, and that no sooner over — but they are smitten in another part. So that *they are prone to perpetual murmurings*. Never was anybodies life so miserable, as theirs! They are ready to quarrel at God, at men, at anything, at nothing. They are neither content to live, nor ready to die. But yet seem to be discontent with life, and to be in love with death, whereupon their common note is, "I have lived too long, O that I were in my grave!"

But this distemper argues great weakness of grace — yes a great weakness of spirit. Hence that philosopher that sometimes resolved, that a wise and courageous man should not flee from life, how ever unpleasant his life may be. Yet at other times advised suicide — to let the wearied soul out of the useless body before its time. This is a crime of the deepest tincture! To snatch the prerogative of our sovereign creator out of his hands, whose rightful privilege alone it is, to give life to men, and to take it away.

Why should you be so uneasy under these momentary trials? Is it not the lot which your heavenly father has in great wisdom, set out for you? It is better to be old and ill on earth — than to have been sent young to Hell. You have your ailments, and if you were privy to others men's afflictions, you would be reconciled to your own. It was Socrates' observation, that *if every man's burden were laid on a common heap, each man would be glad to take up his*

own again. You should rather be thankful to God for the blessings of the former part of your life, than murmur at the troubles of the present.

You think it the only happiness, to have all the comforts of this world; but the godly have thought it a greater to have the mind fixed on things above.

You have, or else the fault is your own, the company of a gracious God and a good conscience — when you are incapable of other company. You should imitate the grasshopper, to whom the old man by some is likened, who is made the emblem of contentment, because she only sucks the dew and sings — and is content with that. The one eternal *crown* of glory, will swallow up all your *crosses*. But discontent makes your condition most uneasy here, and most unfit for Heaven hereafter.

2. Another temptation which you that are old are in danger of, is HARDNESS OF HEART and CARNAL SECURITY. You have seen many swept away by the hand of God — and you have escaped. Yes, some of you perhaps have lived long in some sinful course, are grown old in adulteries ([Ezekiel 23:43](#)), or in oppression, or in some other sin. These things you have done — and the Lord has kept silence. And now you are ready to think that he is such a one as yourselves — and to bless yourselves in your woeful ways, until your iniquity be found to be hateful.

The aged person surely must have either a very tender heart — or a very hard one. If God's ordinances and providences, His mercies and afflictions, have made a due impression upon you — then your hearts must be very soft. But otherwise, you are in the greatest danger of a hard heart, and a spirit of slumber.

Watch and pray therefore, in the fear of God, against this dangerous temptation. They are most guilty of this distemper — who were never afraid of it. Preserve a due tenderness in your consciences — do not allow any sin to come upon you unrepented. Endeavor to have daily a clearer sight of sin, and a deeper sense of the *evil* of it. Let the *exemplary judgments upon others*, startle you. Know, that if you sleep in sin — then your preservation will be but a reservation to an inevitable Hell. Remember that "though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged — yet it shall not be well with the wicked!" [Ecclesiastes 8: 12-13](#). The greatest judgment that can befall a man upon earth, is to prosper in any sinful way.

There is a *natural* hardness in all men, there is a *habitual* hardness in some men, but there is a *judicial* hardness only in such as are ripe for Hell.

The first, if it is not cured by God's grace — leads to the second — and the second prepares for the third.

Of all sorts of men, you that are old have least cause to be carnally secure, who have one foot already in the grave. The *green* apple may be *plucked* off, but the *ripe* one is *falling* off already. It is not the approach of death, without the effectual influence of God's Spirit that will soften a hardened sinner; as is too evident in the malefactors in Newgate Prison, who will be drunk and swear at a dreadful rate, when they know that the *execution day* is certain.

nly at hand. Be instant therefore with the Lord, to deliver you from hardness of heart, from a spirit of slumber in sin, and from a reprobate outcome.

3. A third temptation which old-age must watch against, is, SLOTHFULNESS. The decay of natural vigor disposes them hereunto, and corrupt nature joins with the temptation. It is an easy thing to be idle, and flesh and blood is glad enough of excuses from pains and trouble. Indeed, where natural limbs, or natural strength are wasted, much cannot be expected, "Of what use was the strength of their hands to me, since their vigor had gone from them?" [Job 30:2](#)

Time is so short, so precious, so irrevocable, that it should not be slept or trifled away, if we can do anything for the ends of holy life. The aged person must consider, how much waste ground there has been in the field of his life; how many years are lost in childhood and vanity; how much time at riper years in unnecessary sleep and recreations; how much has been consumed in doing nothing; and how much in doing worse than nothing. It is an easy thing to *waste* time, it is an hard thing to *redeem* time, and it is an impossible thing to *recall* time. And therefore those who have lost so much time, and can recall none of it, had need to *redeem*, and make the best of that which is left.

Few men will throw away their money, but most men squander away their lives. They are most prodigal in that wherein they may most justly be covetous.

Let no aged person imagine, that they are to live to no purpose. The Levites, though at fifty years of age, they were discharged from the most laborious service of the temple — yet they were not left to be idle, but to do the work of the Lord in some more easy employments.

The truth is, sloth is a vice that accelerates old-age, and aids the languishment of the mind and body. We shall not feel it so sensibly, while we are continually employed. How much knowledge and wisdom have we neglected, which we might have obtained, if our sloth had not beguiled us?

Hence comes *neglect* of the means of grace, to which we may add *drowsiness* in the use of them. Aged people are apt to satisfy themselves in the omission of reading, hearing, praying by their illnesses and infirmities. Indeed when we are inevitably hindered in these means, and are grieved for that hindrance — then God will supply those wants. But if we be glad that we have an excuse whereby we may, without sin omit our duty — it savors strongly of hypocrisy.

And aged people are more concerned than others to be diligent herein; for many of them have put off much of their greatest business to their old-age, and therefore their plea of *feebleness* will be overruled.

"I have lost a world of time," said one on his death-bed; "if I had one year longer, I would spend it in reading David's Psalms, and in Paul's epistles."

Neither imagine, that you are too old to learn, for the fundamentals of doctrine and practice may easily, and must necessarily be learned — else he who made you will not save you, and he who formed you will show you no favor. As weak as you are, you could creep to the as

sembly to be laden back again with golden grace; and a *grain of grace* is worth a world of riches.

In Scripture, you find a paralyzed man carried in a bed to Christ, and the house untiled to let him down through the roof, rather than continue under the grave affliction. Will you languish in your spiritual distempers, and use no means for healing? Be not deceived, God is not mocked! He never accepts the will for the deed — if the deed can be done.

And though your years may dispose you to drowsiness in the service of God — yet they will not wholly excuse you. We read but of one person in the bible, who slept at sermon, and he was taken up dead thereby, [Acts 20:9](#). It is a sin charged on them of old, [Isaiah 64:7](#), "There is none who calls on your name, who stirs up himself to take hold on you." You should use all possible means to shake off that drowsy distemper, and set the holy God before you. *Remember that the diligent hand makes rich in this world — and the diligent heart rich forever.* Remember that grace and comfort are like the manna, which was to be gathered early, or else it vanished. Those who loved their beds, starved their bellies.

How much good might you do and get, notwithstanding your years, if you would shake off that slothful distemper which haunts you? How many have lamented at their end, their loss of time? Nothing so much troubled that excellent preacher, Dr. Robert Harris, when he was on his death-bed, as loss of time.

Rouse up then your benumbed spirits, your time of action will last but a short while. Consider, wherein you are capable to serve your generation by the will of God — and be up and doing. The grave will be most irksome to the loiterer, but most welcome to the laborer, for there the weary, and only they will be at rest.

4. The fourth temptation which aged people are liable unto, is, expectation still of longer life. No man is so old, says the orator, but thinks it very possible to weather it out a year longer; and such men do, upon the matter, think they may live always. It has been an old complaint, *that men eat and drink, as though they must die tomorrow — and yet buy and build as though they must live always.* How usual is it with very aged men and women, to contrive and appoint affairs for a month, or a year beforehand? It is not only young people that say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." [James 4:13-15](#)

But even aged people are apt to think the same thing. The most decrepit person imagines that he shall abide here a little longer; and when that time is expired, still reckons to continue a little longer.

The folly and ungroundedness of this vain imagination, is obvious. For what should induce one that is already dying, to think that he shall not very quickly die soon? Alas! Death has laid its cold hand already upon us. Our eyes, our ears, our hands, our legs, our lungs, our very vitals are death-struck already! Death puts in for a share in every day we spend. Have we taken any lease of our lives, for a determinate time? Can we produce any reason, any one reason to prove that we should live a year, or a week longer? I am sure the provoking sins w

high are in our souls, and the unruly humours which are in our bodies — render our speedy death more likely, than a longer life — besides the rage of Satan against us, and the many casualties incident to us. Now when a man expects anything, and has no reason for such his expectation — it is lamentably ridiculous.

But what little reason in any way there is for such an imagination, there is some cause of it and the cause seems to be *a reluctance to die*. To few there are, that are willing to part with things seen — for things unseen. They are reluctant to go out of this world of men and women — into a world of souls. Death is like a cup that will either mend or end — and such a dose is taken with a trembling hand. And therefore the heart cries out, "Let me alone this year also!" Thus men would put far from them the evil day, and it will prove an evil day, when it is thus deferred.

Alas! It is not the duration of ones life, but the goodness and comfort of it, that is considerable. This the *dim eye of nature* saw and concluded — that a wise man chooses to live as long as he *ought*, not as long as he *could*. I know it is a hard division, to have a soul and a body that have lived long together, to part asunder — but it is irrevocably appointed unto men to die! And when a thing is indispensably necessary, it is the best course to consider what will best mitigate it, and render it either desirable or tolerable.

Wherein as right *reason* may contribute much — so Christian religion may contribute much more; whereby the holy soul is assured of a far better house, than the body — and the body of a far better estate, after it has slept a while in the grave.

To *remedy* therefore this temptation, consider the folly and ill effects thereof. That is a foolish traveler, who being quite spent with the fatigue of his journey, would turn again and travel it over again — when nothing is more welcome to the weary than a quiet lodging. Upon occasion of this groundless expectation in that rich man in [Luke 12](#) — our Savior plainly calls him, *You fool!* For it is the rankest folly, to expect when winter is coming, that it will relent and retire again, because we dislike it. No more will death forbear us — but when our name is called, we must go.

But this *vain expectation of a longer life* unfits us for death — it keeps the soul secure and careless — we defer that until tomorrow, which should be done to day. We lose the present time, and reckon on the future which is not in our hands, but in God's. This causes men to procrastinate their repentance, to defer the good works which they have purposed to do, yes the very making of their last will has been protracted here upon by many, until they have been *incapable* to do it.

Let all aged people therefore be advised, to set death each morning between themselves, and the ensuing night. And every night make that reasonable supposition, that death may arrest you before morning. Then the *messenger* that you have so long looked for, will not astonish you when he comes. The sting of death is in a great measure lost, when we are first aware of it. He who in this respect dies *daily*, will die *easily* and *happily* at last.

Section 6. The sixth work of old-age is to PROVIDE FOR POSTERITY. To many when they are going out of this world, care not what becomes, either temporally, or eternally, of those who shall come after them. And accordingly will neither plant a tree, nor repair a house, nor do anything for the benefit of posterity. They allow all things to go to ruin, because they are removing into another world themselves. Yes and they commit divers ways for some selfish present small advantage — leaving great inconveniences to their children. Whereas the very heathen had better principles, and enjoined their old men to plant trees, etc. which might be useful to another generation. Thus a man may be benefitting others still, after he is dead and gone — and God may be praised for your care and kindness, by those who succeed you.

And another sort there are, that instead of leaving any blessing or benefit — lay up a *curse* for their posterity; by leaving them estates which they have got by fraud and injustice, or some unconscionable course. This is the ready way to melt away the rest, which was justly obtained. You cannot invent a more compendious and infallible means to undo all your posterity, than by transferring to them goods or estates unjustly gotten. For God is righteous, and will not prosper unrighteous dealings. "I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him." [Ecclesiastes 5:13-14](#)

But if you have any care or concern for your posterity, lay up a stock of *prayers* for them, and leave them, as is aforementioned, wholesome and good rules concerning piety, equity and charity. Leave them an account of your own *experience* in all things material; that so, if they have any brains, they may cheaply learn — what you have dearly bought. And especially leave them a copy of your own *godly example*, which will be a constant monitor, and check to them in the whole course of their conversation.

But these having been touched before, that which remains for the peace, comfort and good of posterity, *is a prudent and seasonable settling of your outward estate*. It is strange to see the great backwardness of many aged people to this work — as if making their will would either lessen their estates, or shorten their lives — a gross and groundless opinion. Whereas the neglecting of this affair, has a train of very bad consequences; particularly, many of the most tedious suits of law are occasioned thereby, mutual love among relations spoiled, the poor overcome by the rich, the simple by the cunning, the orphan by the guardian, and very often the whole estate squandered away in wrestling for it. What a folly is this, to neglect that which would both quiet your own minds, and preserve quiet among those who come after? Ten lines discreetly written in your will, would prevent ten thousand lines when you are dead.

When the Lord therefore sent a message of death, by the prophet Isaiah, to King Hezekiah, he commanded him to set his house in order, [Isaiah 38:1](#). As if that work must of necessity, go before his death.

The aged person then ought to present this message daily to his soul: "Man, set your house in order!" For since it is uncertain in what place, or in what moment death waits for us — it behooves us to wait for it in every place, and every moment, and consequently to set not only the *heart*, but the *house* in order.

And in the doing of this work, let *reason* and *sound judgment* over-rule passion and affection. If need be, get advice in law — the neglect by which renders the testaments of many people nothing, but bones of contention; and so the sparing of a small fee at present — proves the spending of many in a short time. But however, weigh your purposes in a good conscience, and remember that you are only stewards under God, whose you are, and your whole estate. Think with yourselves, what judgment wise and impartial people will pass upon your disposals, when you are in the grave. Pray therefore unto God on this occasion, that he would first direct, and then establish your purposes, which is the likeliest way to bring them to pass.

And dispatch this affair wisely, while you are in health and strength. For you can never do it as you would, nor perhaps as you should, when you are in the power of those who stand waiting for your estate. What if upon the alteration of your circumstances, you revise your will, and alter it every year? Is it not much better to be at that trouble, than either to defer it until you can make none at all — or such as must savor greatly of your present weakness?

Do not imagine, that the expedition of this, will hasten your death. For what influence or efficacy can this have, to procure any such effect? It were easy to produce those who have never been without a will written and sealed, for thirty or forty years together. It affords a man great satisfaction, in case any sudden sickness seize upon him — that he has nothing of any earthly affairs to trouble him — nothing to do but to bear, or to be relieved of his illness. For when our inward state is fixed, and our outward state is settled — yet we shall find it work enough, to grapple with the disquiets of a disease, and with the pangs of death.

Section 7. The seventh work of old-age, is MORTIFICATION. And the object of is double:

1. That which is *evil* in itself.
 2. That which is *lawful* in itself.
- The Christian aged person has work in both these.

1. That which is EVIL in itself. One great work of old-age is *dying to sin* — to all sin. "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do — living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry." [1 Peter 4:3](#). We have sinned enough already, yes much more than enough; it is high time to undo that which has almost undone us. We are dying, it is necessary that our sins die before us, and that by faith in the death of Christ, and repentance from dead works. For lack of which course, our *evidences* prove vague, and snarled with inextricable doubts.

It is not enough, that we lack strength, or opportunity to sin — but our *wills* and *desires* towards it, must be dead also. Sin is only asleep, or benumbed in us — if we have not used God's means to crucify it. It's not sufficient that we *leave* sin — except we loath it. Go thoroughly with this work; do it quickly, do it sincerely. It is either, kill — or be killed. *Necessity* makes the coward resolute. Dread not any scriptural severities necessary in mortification. Some devils are not cast out without prayer and fasting. Hippocrates observes that old-age is th

e fittest for the use of fasting. The wounds that sin has made, must be searched to the bottom. And doubtless sin is never crucified, no more than Christ was, without pain.

How justly does the Scripture stigmatize sin with the name of folly? To weave a web that must be unraveled; and to make us spend our lives between sinful joys, and painful sorrows.

And though old-age does not mortify sin by itself — yet cooling our lusts and passions, old-age proves helpful. We are truly thankful unto God for that advantage, and that we use other necessary means to that end, we may comfortably acquiesce in that blessed effect; and rejoice that the things which are displeasing to God — have become unpleasant to us. But we must not be content to be only *passive* in the decays of sin; we must be active in crucifying it. "If you, through the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body — you shall live!" [Romans 8:13](#).

And as all sin must be the object of mortification, so especially all *youthful* sins. For as Chrysostom says, an old man acting juvenile sins — is far more ridiculous than young people who commit those sins. To have our hearts burn with lust, or revenge, when our veins are freezing with old age; the soul raging and the body dying — is monstrous.

The Scripture gives us a sad instance of this, even of *Solomon* the best and wisest of men a live, who had done more for God, and God for him, than any man in the age he lived in. That he when he was between fifty and sixty years of age, should be so far enslaved to his strange *wives*, as to be carried by them to worship strange *gods*. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart, etc. [1 Kings 11:4](#). Whereby Solomon died in such a cloud, as has drawn his very salvation into question.

Let it be a warning to all aged people, to see that their corruptions be not only *asleep* — but *dead*, as far as is attainable in this life. That the *old* man, as well as the *outward* man perish, and that the inward man be renewed day by day. That our thoughts, our words, our very behavior and attire proclaim that sin and we are parted never to meet again!

A light behavior in a grave person, is foolish and loathsome. "As dead flies cause even a bottle of perfume to smell bad — so a little foolishness spoils great wisdom and honor." [Ecclesiastes 10:1](#)

2. That which is LAWFUL in itself. The other object of mortification proper for old-age, is the world and all the innocent, but charming vanities thereof. Not that they are bound actually to forsake the world, either the needful cares, or the lawful comforts of it — but to wean and abate their *desires* for it, their *delights* in it, their *cares* about it. This should be every Christians work, but it should be the aged people care, in a more eminent measure. For they are ready to leave this world, and ascend into another — and every one takes their mind off a house they are leaving.

The world also is forsaking them — the pleasure they have formerly taken in foods, apparel, building, is much decayed. The things which formerly ravished, are now grown insipid — and does not this call aloud to them to real mortification? You should most readily consent to part with them, and say, "Farewell my gold and all my gaities, I meant not to *enjoy*, but *use* you. I can be happy without you."

It is the most absurd sight in the world, to see one gaping and grasping after this world, when he is going into another world. "Let your moderation be known unto all men, the Lord is at hand." [Philippians 4:5](#). Your loins should be always girded about, and your lights burning, and you yourselves like men who wait for their Lord to come, [Luke 12:35](#). "I write unto you fathers, love not the world, neither the things that are in the world!" [1 John 2:14-15](#). Abate your love to things below — and increase your love to things above. Nothing can overcome love but love — as nothing can fetch out fire like fire. Love of earthly things, is overcome by the love of heavenly things. O when we love all these things for God — we will willingly leave them all to go to God, for whose sake only we valued them. Otherwise you will find it an hard thing to leave them — even like the plucking the skin off your hand. Whereas the heart that is mortified to them, can part with them, as easily as you can draw the *glove* off your hand. How ready did Moses go up into the mount, and die! What little noise or dispute did Jacob, or David, or Paul make about leaving the world? They were dead to the world. He who said "I am ready to be offered up," had said before, "the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world." So the aged Christian should be mortified to life itself — he should be very well content to die.

It was a sad confession of Caesar Borgia that ambitious grandee, when he was near his end, that he was prepared for every occurrence but death; which was the only thing that he should have been most ready for!

But 'tis grace, not years that makes us dead to the world, and to the desire for life. When the aged man has made it his business to honor God, to save his own soul, and to serve his own generation — he may with inconceivable comfort say with old Simeon, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace; I am done with this life, welcome be the grave, welcome everlasting life!"

Section 8. The eighth work of old-age is, laying up treasure in Heaven. By Heaven I understand not only the place, but the nature of the treasures, heavenly treasures. Some of these the aged will have need of *before* death, of some *at* death, of some *after* death.

1. You should lay up for yourselves a treasure of prayers, and promises to support you BEFORE death comes. There are *promises* that are very comfortable and very necessary for aged people — which those who are assured of God's veracity, and their own integrity, may apply to themselves, as if individually directed unto them. The apostle makes that inference from that excellent promise, which has more value in it, than all the old man's bags and bonds, [Hebrews 13:5](#), "I will never leave you, nor forsake you!" Whence he infers, verse 6, "So that we, even we, may boldly say, the Lord is my helper!"

Another promise there is, most comfortable for aged people, "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you!" [Isaiah 46:4](#). When our feeble legs will not carry us; when the pillars of the house tremble, and in effect cry out, "We can bear you no longer!" then will the power and goodness of God carry us up and deliver us. Yes when we approach death, and fear presents it and the grave most formidably — we may then apply what the Lord spoke to old Jacob, concerning his going down into Egypt, [Genesis 46:3](#). "I am God, the God of your father, fear not to go down into Egypt. For I will go down with you, and will also sur

ely bring you up again." So assuredly will the Lord go down with us to the grave, and as surely bring us up again — so how can we be afraid with such company, and with such a promise?

Hoard up this gracious promise, [Psalm 23:4](#), "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me!" More yet, "This God is our God forever and ever — he will be our guide even unto death!"

These and such like promises, left by him that cannot lie, will support the sinking spirits of a poor Christian more than all the friends, the cordials, the extrinsic comforts in the whole world.

2. AT death you will need a treasure of faith and patience. The reign of *sense* is expired — something is necessary to support a dying man, more than a living healthy man. What is it that makes death terrible to a poor creature? The withdrawing of all a man's outward comforts — and the appearance of all his sins! Also, when one is dying, they must leave husband, wife, children, parents, friends, house, all. Now faith will give us a real sight of the eternal world; and one sight of that quite disgraces and annihilates all the comforts of this world. "Adieu poor house — I see a far better mansion ready for me! Adieu my dearest friends and relations — I see those enjoyments before me, that utterly eclipse you all!"

And then, when your sins are mustered up before you, their heinous nature, and deserved punishment, and Satan bestirs himself to represent them with the greatest terror to the aged dying person — then, if faith is dormant, the poor soul is driven into the pit of despair. But a lively faith flies to Jesus Christ, runs into his wounds, lays hold on his everlasting righteousness, and so bids defiance to Satan, yes even to the law, and all his sins, with, "Who is he who condemns me? It is Christ who died for me!"

It is fabled that when a certain believer lay dying, one like a scribe came into his chamber with pen and paper, calling to him to reckon up his sins; "For I am sent from God to bring an account of them to his tribunal!" "Well," says the sick man, raising up himself as well as he could, and perceiving that he had to do with his great enemy, the devil, "Write this down first: The seed of the woman shall break the serpents head — and you may write all my sins under it!" Whereupon the accuser of the brethren presently vanished, and left the weak man in peace.

"And you will have need of *endurance* also, that after you have done and suffered the will of God, you may receive the promise!" [Hebrews 10:36](#). So acute, or else tedious are some distempers, that they will strain all the nerves of the soul, to wrestle with them. Lay up therefore, by diligent reading, hearing, meditation, and prayer — a stock of these graces, before the evil day comes. These are the true riches, and which neither the *fire* can burn, nor the *plague* infect, nor *time* waste, nor *thieves* purloin.

3. And lastly, it behooves the aged to lay up a treasure, which they may meet with AFTER death. Namely, of good works. This life is your seed-time for these; and those who scatter this precious seed, shall doubtless, mark, doubtless they shall come again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them, [Psalm 126:6](#). Faith and good works may well agree

e in a Christian, and though they cannot cooperate to a man's justification, (for though both of them are acts of a creature — yet faith derives not this influence from the subject, but from the *object*; it justifies as it apprehends and embraces Christ) notwithstanding both are necessary to salvation. "Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in Heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys." [Luke 12:33](#). That is, this treasure is neither liable to intrinsic decay, nor to extrinsic casualty.

These the apostle calls a good foundation, "Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life!" [1 Timothy 6:18-19](#). Other riches you lay up for others, yes perhaps for such as you know not; but by doing all the good you can, you lay up something in store for yourselves. What if the advantage is not at present visible — men will lay out money upon a good retirement, though they never live to enjoy it. Here is a retirement worth the having, eternal life.

Many useful things may be done in this life, which cannot be done by you when this life is ended. Now you may feed the poor, clothe the naked, redeem the captive, encourage learning, promote soul-saving preaching, etc. Are you any other than God's stewards? And poor Christians, poor tradesmen, poor scholars, poor ministers are God's poor — to whom he appoints you to do good out of his stock in your hand, according to your ability and their necessity. You do but draw bills upon almighty God by every good work, which he will most faithfully and fully pay in the kingdom of Heaven.

Our blessed Savior has said enough to persuade us, if we are not infidels, from that parable of the unjust steward, [Luke 16](#). Where he thus concludes, verse 9, "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings!" [Luke 16:9](#).

Consider now before it is too late, what a sad prospect it will be for you on your death-bed, to review the book of a life, wherein is nothing but *blots* and *transgressions* on the one side of the page — and blanks and omissions of good on the other side.

Bethink yourselves therefore, which way you may yet do some good in the world. Do not live — and do not die, to yourselves. Poor Christ in his members begs of you to remember him. Oblige him here in the earthly country — and he will befriend you at the heavenly court. "While you have opportunity, do good unto all, especially to the household of faith!" [Galatians 6:10](#). Your opportunity will shortly be over and past; yet you have something to give, and somebody to give unto, but if you refuse or delay it, shortly you will have nothing to give, and nobody to relieve. And remember God's counsel, [2 Corinthians 9:6](#), "He who sows sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully, shall reap bountifully."

I urge you not to undo yourselves, by doing good to others; but that you be ready, willing, and rich in good works, according to the talents with which you are entrusted. And this will be a good proof that your faith is sound, when you can part with present and visible things, upon the word and promise of an invisible God — for future things which are unseen.

And, if the circumstances of your estate will bear it — let me prevail with you to make your own eyes your overseers, and your own hands your executors. For though I would not discourage anyone from making pious or charitable bequests in their wills, by bewailing the uncertainty, the abuse, and loss of such intentions — but the thing itself is no way so laudable, or acceptable — only to part with what we cannot keep. It insinuates, that if we could always live, we would never part with anything. Whereby there is neither that *faith*, nor that *charity* exercised which befits a Christian. "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due." Mark it is due to them, when it is in the power of your hand to do it. [Proverbs 3:27](#). You are just ready to travel into another country, take care to send something before you, lest you lose both earth and Heaven at once!

Section 9. The ninth work of old-age, is meditation of death and eternity. Meditation in general, is the application of our thoughts to some particular holy subject. Meditation is a most excellent and useful exercise, and which greatly enriches the soul. It was a clear proof of the great sanctity of David's heart, that he was so frequent and familiar in this employment; sometimes meditation on God, sometimes on his word, sometimes on his works, both of creation and of providence, etc. O that we all had the heart of it, for the heart is all.

Doubtless if our love for holy things were stronger, our meditation would be on these things, for where the treasure is, there the heart will dwell also. I know some constitutions of body are more capable of it than others, but certainly the more the soul is sanctified, that is, *mortified* to things below and *vivified* to things above — the more cheerfully will it dwell upon spiritual things. Such as the stomach is, such food will it desire.

But among other useful points, the aged person is greatly concerned to meditate on death, and the endless life after it. Which is to pencil out before the eyes of his mind — the time of his departure, the serious circumstances and consequences of it. In our meditations, we should place ourselves upon our death-beds, gasping there for breath, our friends ready to close our eyes, the dab of phlegm ready to stop our breath, and our souls just forsaking the poor carcass. When we look upon our hands and feet, it should be attended with these thoughts — that shortly they will be turned to rottenness; that the worms will make furrows in our faces, and feed upon our very hearts. Yes, that we at present breed and nourish the vermin that wait for to devour us! That before long we shall have nothing to do here, our house and goods will be in the possession of those who would be affrighted to see us again. That at we must lodge a long time in the dark grave, and the soul must go into an unknown world, and that unto all eternity. These are thoughts for aged people; and not to be roving about things past to no purpose, or contriving about things of this present world. This is in some sense to die daily, namely, by serious thoughts concerning our latter end.

The truth is, this is a duty incumbent upon all. Hence that saying, "Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this: That they would consider their latter end!" [Deuteronomy 32:29](#). "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." [Psalm 90:12](#)

A *deaths-head* is no unfit article for a bedroom dresser. The serious apprehensions of the exceeding great change which death will make, would give a check to that immorality, worldliness and vain-glory, which cleaves to us all by nature.

For death observes not our human order. It is uncertain — we are not called according to our age — it proceeds not according to our registers. Your considering of death will not make you older, but better. But principally it concerns the aged, who live in the confines of the grave. You should be acquainted with death, for you are a neighbor to it. It is one of the Spanish Proverbs, that the old man's staff is the rapper at deaths-door.

Alas! How small is the distance between an old man and his grave! Is it not reasonable therefore, is it not necessary, that we should be ready for this enemy? And since we cannot escape death — ought we not to be reconciled to it — to be better acquainted with it — yes and learn some way to overcome it. And certainly the more we rightly think of death — the less we shall fear it or be hurt by it. We must drink this bitter cup, and therefore it is all the reason in the world, that we should take some foretastes of it, especially considering the *sequel* of it — that it sets us on an everlasting shore!

It is time for aged people seriously think whether a *crown* or *flames* are just before them. When you sit trimming the fire ponder this — whether you can endure the fire that is unquenchable. When you lift up those dazzled eyes towards Heaven — consider what title you have to the blessed mansions there.

What have you to do with this poor world below? Your business now should be in invisibles! You have studied long enough how to live — at length you should study how to die.

These meditations are certainly of great excellence, and of great use. "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting — for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart!" [Ecclesiastes 7:2](#). It is more pleasant indeed to go to the house of feasting — how gladly do people go that way? But it is better to go to the house of mourning, for there we see what is the end of all men, and so the living will lay something that's useful to his heart. These thoughts will quicken any rational man to do and get all the good he can, while he is on this side of the line of eternity. The less a poor old creature can do about the affairs of this life — the more he should endeavor to do about that better life. These thoughts of death will make us careful and conscionable in all our ways, as seeing that our final change is always at hand.

Certainly those who forget their past sins, and neglect their present duty — have cause to fear their reckoning to come. As on the the other side, he who, having an enlightened and sensible conscience, can think of death without disturbance — has made a good progress in religion.

And yet if death were only the finishing of life, these thoughts about it were not so necessary or considerable. But we are assured of an everlasting life immediately following; that the extreme *happiness* or *misery* commences thereupon, which also never ends. Now what thoughts or cares can be so momentous, as those about our endless glory or torment?

Sit down then, compose yourselves for meditation; draw a curtain over all this present world and your concerns therein — and open a window into eternity, and by faith look steadily into it. Look **upward** first, and survey those blessed mansions, that glorious company, the sweet employment, the inconceivable enjoyment, the transcendent bliss of body and soul in the full fruition of God to all eternity. And will not these meditations nullify all the *faint and f*

ading comforts of this present life? Will they not cause you to trample under foot the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season? Will they not easily wean you from your dearest relations upon earth? Will they not carry you with longing desires to enjoy the beatific vision? Will you not cry out with Augustine, "Can no man see your face and live? O let me die then, to see your face!"

Again, look **downward** into that bottomless pit, and by faith behold the desperate condition of the damned. Lay your ear to the key-hole of Hell, and hearken a while to the weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth there! Consider the torments of a roaring conscience, the fury of exasperated devils, the unspeakable racks and tortures of woeful bodies — which must be as much beyond what the most cruel human malice can invent or act, as the almighty and just indignation of God exceeds the weak and finite wrath of man — and as these continue during the innumerable spaces of an inconceivable eternity!

The aged man must conclude, that there is no other way for him to take at death, but into one of these receptacles, and that he may justly expect by reason of his age very shortly to determine this point — that he is even at the door — that he hangs over this eternity by a slender rope, which is now almost fretted through, and that before a few weeks or days are come, he must go the way whence he shall not return.

What agitations of heart would these meditations produce in us?
What diligence in making our calling and election sure?
What contempt of all the world?
What detestation of the sweetest sins?

In short, the thoughts of eternity would effectually disgrace the trifles of time, and prepare the aged for the enjoyment of it.

How does it happen then, that we are so backward to the thoughts of death and the world to come? The truth is, such thoughts are difficult to flesh and blood. Hence, when thousand s died in the wilderness, which should probably of itself have made impressions on the rest — yet then Moses finds it needful to beg of God, [Psalm 90:12](#), "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom." Alas! We find that we can think on . . . any *person* in the world rather than of God, of any *thing* in the world rather than of our soul, of any part of our lives rather than of death, and of any *place* in the world rather than of Heaven.

But shall we gratify our flesh — rather than our Maker, our Redeemer, our Comforter, our own souls? God forbid. How many unpleasant medicines do we take, to preserve or recover the health of the body? But here the health and happiness both of body and soul are concerned. I may boldly say, that death will prove a bitter portion to those who live at ease, and who will make no acquaintance with it, before it seizes upon them.

We are surprised with anything that is altogether new, but *frequent converse makes the most fearful objects familiar*. Walk then into the place of skulls — make room for your coffin in your chambers or in your minds, and call before you all the solemn circumstances of your o

wn funerals — and step now and then into the other world by holy meditation. Your natural eye grows dim — open then the eye of faith, and penetrate into things unseen.

You cannot now work, but you can think. Your sleep is often broken, but then you may have golden hours, when you have various discomforts below, you may have hereby unspeakable comfort above. Yes this will inure you unto, and begin that blessed life which you hope to live forever. He who thus travels often to Heaven while he lives — will more certainly and comfortably be lodged there forever, when he dies.

Section 10. The tenth and last work of old-age, is PERSEVERANCE to the end, and that:

1. In *active obedience* to the will of God.
2. In *suffering* the will of God.

1. In active obedience to the will of God. You must never be weary of well-doing, nor imagine that your work is done — until your life is done. It was an *evil servant*, who because his Lord delayed his coming, fell to beating his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with them drunken, [Matthew 24:48](#). Alas! There are many points of your duty, which you have formerly *omitted* — and there are others which you have done by the *halves*, and spoiled them in your performing of them. You had need therefore to be as busy as ever you can, to *correct the erratas in the large book of your lives*.

You should think, that there are many people who were born after you, who have got the start of you in knowledge, holiness and charity — and therefore you had need to crowd as much work into your narrow time as you can. If your *principles* are sound, you will be some way *fruitful* to the last. "The righteous man will hold on his way, and he who has clean hands will be stronger and stronger!" [Job 17:9](#). If you had but one grain of the right mustard-seed, it will grow to be a great tree. "The path of the just is like the shining light, that shines more and more to the perfect day." [Proverbs 4:18](#).

He who is a saint when he is young, should be an angel when he is old. The nearer anything comes to its center, the faster it moves; so the nearer we approach glory, the more we should hunger after it and labor for it. No man approached nearer unto God than Moses, and no man made so ambitious an attempt, that he might draw nearer to him, "And he said, I beseech you, show me your glory!" [Exod. 33:18](#).

It was a complaint of old, that few people were solicitous how *well*, but only how *long* they should live — when as a good life might be attained by many, a long life only by a few. But *our business should be to live holy — and refer it to the wise God to determine how long*. It is said, [Isaiah 65:20](#), "There shall not be an old man that has not filled his days." That signifies, all the aged shall complete their time, they shall fall ripe into their graves — but then it should follow, that if God in his goodness is pleased to fill up the days of the aged, surely they also should fill their days with some good service or other.

Hold out then to run with patience the race that is set before you. He who sits down within sight of the goal, loses the race, and so loses the things that he has worked for. He who concludes, "I have believed or obeyed sufficiently," is a lost man. The hoary head must be still found in the way of righteousness, [Proverbs 16:31](#). If our *face* is withered — yet we must take care that our *faith* is not withered. We should make it appear, that our *spiritual* heat or zeal, did not result only from our *natural* heat and vigor. To see a young man wise, and an old man zealous — are most grateful objects to God and man. They are those who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality — who shall obtain eternal life. [Romans 2:7](#).

And here let all aged people beware of the *rock of carnal security and presumption*. Some of those who have lived long, are prone to rely upon their very age as an argument of God's favor — whereas old-age will save no man. It may be a means of salvation in a large sense, in affording you space of repentance. But it will be an aggravation of your impenitence, in case you have such *space*, and yet not *grace* to repent. But otherwise old age can make no argument for your salvation; for God has said, that the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed, [Isaiah 65:20](#).

And others that have been *serious* and *serviceable* in their days, may perhaps presume upon what they have *been* or have *done* — as if they might be *justified* thereby; or else that they need to take no further pains about their own salvation or others good. Whereas in the morning we must sow our seed, and not withhold our hand in the evening; for we know not which shall prosper, either this or that; or whether they both shall be alike good. Which Shierom applies to this matter; "Say not", says he, "I have been diligent while I was able; therefore I may rest myself in my old-age. For you know not, whether you shall more please and honor God in your youth, or in your old age".

*Alas! All our righteousness will not cover one of our sins! We must say that we are unprofitable servants, when we have done our best. Neither may we imagine that any our former diligence, will excuse our future negligence. As long as we live, we must not live to ourselves, but we ought to live unto the Lord. [Romans 14:7-8](#). The aged servant cannot do as much as he has done, but he oversees affairs, he directs others in their employments, his head is full of cares about his master's business — and therein he dies, and so must we. "No man must think," says Seneca, "that because of his gray hairs or wrinkles only, he has lived long. He may have endured long, but he has not *lived*, unless he have improved his life."*

It was the honorable epitaph of Abraham, [Genesis 25:8](#) "He died in a good old age, an old man and full of years." You may add, full of grace and comfort, full of Heaven. And it was the comfortable encouragement of Eliphaz to Job, which was truly fulfilled unto him, "You shall all come to your grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn comes in, in its season." [Job 5:26](#). For he died old and full of days, [Job 42](#). He had lived as long as he could wish, and had lived to good purpose. He was full of days, and his days were full of good fruits.

2. The other branch of perseverance is, in suffering the will of God, or in passive obedience. The aged person must hold out herein to the end. "He who endures to the end shall be saved." Perhaps you will be followed with great distress and of long continuance — and sore sickness and of long continuance — as is threatened, [Deuteronomy 28:59](#). You ca

not reasonably expect, but that at least some bodily distemper will last as long as your life, yes perhaps such painful diseases as will put all your patience to the end — if the Lord is not your helper. But yet you must not murmur, nay you must not grudge, nor make haste; but endure the Lord's pleasure, and wait the Lord's timing. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because You are the one who has done this!" The sight of the haven animates the weather-beaten mariner.

Until now the Lord has helped you, and as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. He who has put that compassion into the heart of a father — has a surpassing infinite ocean of compassion in himself. He knows our frame, he remembers that we are but dust, [Psalm 103:13-14](#). He who has the wisdom and power of a God, and the pity of a father — will be sure to lay no more upon you, than he will enable you to bear and to overcome.

And therefore the aged must beware of the other extreme, namely, the pit of despondence, and dejection of spirit. Their sins are mustered up against them, their outward strength is decayed, their spirits broken with a succession of cares and troubles, their distempers and pains are heavy upon them, their friends and relations seem to be weary of them, and an unavoidable enemy death stands just before them! And who can bear up under such and so many weights together! But besides what has been offered before, I add, that as all these mortifications are needful to wean us from this world. So all such discomforts should drive the aged person to his knees — even unto God who has said, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand!" [Isaiah 41:10](#)

Have not all the saints and servants of God that have lived to old-age, passed these difficulties before you? Have they not borne these burdens, that you sink under. There is no temptation befallen you, but what is common to men. Where is the *faith* — where are the *prayers* that you have been laying up for such a time?

Behold death through the looking-glass of God's word, which represents it only as a dissolution — out of a prison, to go to Christ, [Philippians 1:23](#). Going to rest, [Isaiah 57:2](#). Finishing our course, [2 Timothy 4:8](#). Falling asleep in Jesus, [1 Thessalonians 4:14](#). And a stepping out of this world unto our Father, [John 13:1](#).

Strive therefore rather to adorn, than to avoid the cross — considering that, as it is a great honor for you in your old-age to suffer for the truth, so it is a great shame, that the truth should suffer by you.

Nay, it is enough that we be content and quiet under these discouragements, that we who have received good at the hands of the Lord, be content with evil also, but we should triumph over them. In all these things we should be more than conquerors through him who loved us. Our rooted faith, our fixed hope, our long experience should lift us up to surmount all these fears and troubles. We are near the promised land, the news of these *Anakim* in our way should not affright us. When these things come upon you, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life! [Rev. 2:10](#).

And thus we are at length arrived at the end of the aged people's work, which was the seventh and last thing to be treated of in this subject.

The *practice* of these things now only remains: that we study to . . .
correct the causes,
avoid the sins,
obtain the graces,
sustain the inconveniences,
improve the privileges, and
dispatch the work described before us.

Wherein we must earnestly implore the gracious assistance of God, who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, and who will not fail us therein, unless we be lacking to ourselves.

And O that all younger people would learn knowledge, temperance, and industry in their youth — which will be the only means to attain to a healthy and holy old-age.

Finis.