

CHAPTER 25

PROVERBS 25:1

PLEASURE AND ADVANTAGES OF WISDOM

This verse is the title of this latter collection of Solomon's proverbs, for he *sought out and set in order many proverbs*, that by them he might be still *teaching the people knowledge*, ^{<218>}Ecclesiastes 12:9. Observe,

1. The proverbs were Solomon's, who was divinely inspired to deliver, for the use of the church, these wise and weighty sentences; we have had many, but still there are more. Yet herein Christ is greater than Solomon, for if we had all upon record that Christ said, and did, that was instructive, *the world could not contain the books that would be written*, ^{<215>}John 21:25.

2. The publishers were Hezekiah's servants, who, it is likely, herein acted as his servants, being appointed by him to do this good service to the church, among other good offices that he did *in the law and in the commandments*, ^{<142>}2 Chronicles 31:21. Whether he employed the prophets in this work, as Isaiah, Hosea, or Micah, who lived in his time, or some that were trained up in the schools of the prophets, or some of the priests and Levites, to whom we find him giving a charge concerning divine things (^{<140>}2 Chronicles 29:4), or (as the Jews think) his princes and ministers of state, who were more properly called his *servants*, is not certain; if the work was done by Eliakim, and Joah, and Shebna, it was no diminution to their character. They copied out these proverbs from the records of Solomon's reign, and published them as an appendix to the former edition of this book. It may be a piece of very good service to the church to publish other man's works that have lain hidden in obscurity, perhaps a great while. Some think they culled these out of the 3000 proverbs which Solomon spoke (^{<142>}1 Kings 4:32), leaving out those that were physical, and that pertained to natural philosophy, and preserving such only as were divine and moral; and in this collection some observe that special regard was had to those observations which concern kings and their administration.

PROVERBS 25:2-3

PLEASURE AND ADVANTAGES OF WISDOM

Here is,

1. An instance given of the honour of God: *It is his glory to conceal a matter.* He needs not search into any thing, for he perfectly knows every thing by a clear and certain view, and nothing can be hidden from him; and yet his own *way is in the sea* and his *path in the great waters.* There is an unfathomable depth in his counsels, ^{}Romans 11:33. It is but a little portion that is heard of him. *Clouds and darkness are round about him.* We see what he does, but we know not the reasons. Some refer it to the sins of men; it is his glory to pardon sin, which is covering it, not remembering it, not mentioning it; his forbearance, which he exercises towards sinners, is likewise his honour, in which he seems to keep silence and take no notice of the matter.

2. A double instance of the honour of kings: —

(1.) It is God's glory that he needs not *search into a matter*, because he knows it without search; but it is the honour of kings, with a close application of mind, and by all the methods of enquiry, to search out the matters that are brought before them, to take pains in examining offenders, that they may discover their designs and bring to light the hidden works of darkness, not to give judgment hastily or till they have weighed things, nor to leave it wholly to others to examine things, but to see with their own eyes.

(2.) It is God's glory that he cannot himself be found out by searching, and some of that honour is devolved upon kings, wise kings, that *search out matters*; their *hearts are unsearchable*, like the *height of heaven* or the *depth of the earth*, which we may guess at, but cannot measure. Princes have their *arcana imperii* — *state secrets*, designs which are kept private, and reasons of state, which private persons are not competent judges of, and therefore ought not to pry into. Wise princes, when they *search into a matter*, have reaches which one would not think of, as Solomon, when he called of a sword to divide the living child with, designing thereby to discover the true mother.

~~25~~ PROVERBS 25:4-5

PRUDENTIAL MAXIMS

This shows that the vigorous endeavour of a prince to suppress vice, and reform the manners of his people, is the most effectual way to support his government. Observe,

1. what the duty of magistrates is: To *take away the wicked*, to use their power for the terror of evil works and evil workers, not only to banish those that are vicious and profane from their presence, and forbid them the court, but so to frighten them and restrain them that they may not spread the infection of their wickedness among their subjects. This is called *taking away the dross from the silver*, which is done by the force of fire. Wicked people are the dross of a nation, the scum of the country, and, as such, to be taken away. If men will not take them away, God will, ~~25~~ Psalm 119:119. If the *wicked be taken away from before the king*, if he abandon them and show his detestation of their wicked courses, it will go far towards the disabling of them to do mischief. The reformation of the court will promote the reformation of the kingdom, ~~25~~ Psalm 101:3, 8.

2. What the advantage will be of their doing this duty.

(1.) It will be the bettering of the subjects; they shall be made like silver refined, fit to be made *vessels of honour*.

(2.) It will be the settling of the prince. *His throne shall be established in this righteousness*, for God will bless his government, the people will be pliable to it, and so it will become durable.

~~25~~ PROVERBS 25:6-7

PRUDENTIAL MAXIMS

Here we see,

1. That religion is so far from destroying good manners that it reaches us to behave ourselves lowly and reverently towards our superiors, to keep our distance, and give place to those to whom it belongs “*Put not forth*

thyself rudely and carelessly *in the king's presence*, or in the presence of great men; do not *compare with them*” (so some understand it); “do not vie with them in apparel, furniture, gardens, house-keeping, or retinue, for that is an affront to them and will waste thy own estate.”

2. That religion teaches us humility and self-denial, which is a better lesson than that of good manners: “Deny thyself the place thou art entitled to; covet not to make a fair show, nor air at preferment, nor thrust thyself into the company of those that are above thee; be content in a low sphere if that is it which God has allotted to thee.” The reason he gives is because this is really the way to advancement, as our Saviour shows in a parable that seems to be borrowed from this, ~~249~~ Luke 14:9. Not that we must *therefore* pretend modesty and humility, and make a stratagem of it, for the courting of honour, but *therefore* we must really be modest and humble, because God will put honour on such and so will men too. It is better, more for a man's satisfaction and reputation, to be advanced above his pretensions and expectations, than to be thrust down below them, *in the presence of the prince*, whom it was a great piece of honour to be admitted to the sight of and a great piece of presumption to look upon without leave.

~~258~~ PROVERBS 25:8-10

PRUDENTIAL MAXIMS

I. Here is good counsel given about going to law: —

1. “Be not hasty in bringing an action, before thou hast thyself considered it, and consulted with thy friends about it: *Go not forth hastily to strive*; do not send for a writ in a passion, or upon the first appearance of right on thy side, but weigh the matter deliberately, because we are apt to be partial in our own cause; consider the certainty of the expenses and the uncertainty of the success, how much care and vexation it will be the occasion of, and, after all, the cause may go against thee; surely then thou shouldst not *go forth hastily to strive*.”

2. “Bring not an action before thou hast tried to end the matter amicably (v. 9): *Debate thy cause with thy neighbour* privately, and perhaps you will understand one another better and see that there is no occasion to go

to law.” In public quarrels the war that must at length end might better have been prevented by a treaty of peace, and a great deal of blood and treasure spared. It is so in private quarrels: “Sue not thy neighbour as a *heathen man and a publican* until thou hast told him his fault between thee and him alone, and he has refused to refer the matter, or to come to an accommodation. Perhaps the matter in variance is a secret, not fit to be divulged to any, much less to be brought upon the stage before the country; and therefore end it privately, that it may not be discovered.” *Reveal not the secret of another*, so some read it. “Do not, in revenge, to disgrace thy adversary, disclose that which should be kept private and which does not at all belong to the cause.”

II. Two reasons he gives why we should be thus cautious in going to law:

1. “Because otherwise the cause will be in danger of going against thee, and thou wilt *not know what to do* when the defendant has justified himself in what thou didst charge upon him, and made it out that thy complaint was frivolous and vexatious and that thou hadst no just cause of action, and so *put thee to shame*, non-suit thee, and force thee to pay costs, all which might have been prevented by a little consideration.”

2. “Because it will turn very much to thy reproach if thou fall under the character of being litigious. Not only the defendant himself (v. 8), but he that hears the cause tried will *put thee to shame*, will expose thee as a man of no principle, and *thy infamy will not turn away*; thou wilt never retrieve thy reputation.”

~~251~~ PROVERBS 25:11-12

INSTRUCTIVE SIMILES

Solomon here shows how much it becomes a man,

1. To speak pertinently: *A word upon the wheels*, that runs well, is well-circumstanced, in proper time and place — instruction, advice, or comfort, given seasonably, and in apt expressions, adapted to the case of the person spoken to and agreeing with the character of the person speaking — *is like golden balls resembling apples*, or like true apples of a golden colour

(golden rennets), or perhaps gilded, as sometimes we have gilded laurels, and those embossed *in pictures of silver*, or rather brought to table in a silver network basket, or in a silver box of that which we call *filigree-work*, through which the golden apples might be seen. Doubtless in was some ornament of the table, then well known. As that was very pleasing to the eye, so is *a word fitly spoken* to the ear.

2. Especially to give a reproof with discretion, and so as to make it acceptable. If it be well given, by *a wise reprover*, and well taken, by an *obedient ear*, it is an *earring of gold* and an *ornament of fine gold*, very graceful and well becoming both the reprover and the reproofed; both will have their praise, the reprover for giving it so prudently and the reproofed for taking it so patiently and making a good use of it. Others will commend them both, and they will have satisfaction in each other; he who gave the reproof is pleased that it had the desired effect, and he to whom it was given has reason to be thankful for it as a kindness. *That is well given*, we say, *that is well taken*; yet it does not always prove that that is well taken which is well given. It were to be wished that a *wise reprover* should always meet with an *obedient ear*, but often it is not so.

PROVERBS 25:13

INSTRUCTIVE SIMILES

See here,

1. What ought to be the care of a servant, the meanest that is sent on an errand and entrusted with any business, much more the greatest, the agent and ambassador of a prince; he ought to be *faithful to him that sends him*, and to see to it that he do not, by mistake or with design, falsify his trust, and that he be in nothing that lies in his power wanting to his master's interest. Those that act as factors, by commission, ought to act as carefully as for themselves.

2. How much this will be the satisfaction of the master; it will *refresh his soul* as much as ever the *cold of snow* (which in hot countries they preserve by art all the year round) refreshed the labourers in the harvest, that *bore the burden and heat of the day*. The more important the affair was, and the more fear of its miscarrying, the more acceptable is the

messenger, if he have managed it successfully and well. A faithful minister, Christ's messenger, should be thus acceptable to us (^{<3823>}Job 33:23); however, he will be a *sweet savour to God*, ^{<405>}2 Corinthians 2:15.

^{<3254>}PROVERBS 25:14

INSTRUCTIVE SIMILES

He may be said to boast of a false gift,

1. Who pretends to have received or given that which he never had, which he never gave, makes a noise of his great accomplishments and his good services, but it is all false; he is not what he pretends to be. Or,
2. Who promises what he will give and what he will do, but performs nothing, who raises people's expectations of the mighty things he will do for his country, for his friends, what noble legacies he will leave, but either he has not wherewithal to do what he says or he never designs it. Such a one is like the morning-cloud, that passes away, and disappoints those who looked for rain from it to water the parched ground (^{<3112>}Jude 1:12), *clouds without water*.

^{<3155>}PROVERBS 25:15

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Two things are here recommended to us, in dealing with others, as likely means to gain our point: —

1. Patience, to bear a present heat without being put into a heat by it, and to wait for a fit opportunity to offer our reasons and to give persons time to consider them. By this means even a *prince* may be *persuaded* to do a thing which he seemed very averse to, much more a common person. That which is justice and reason now will be so another time, and therefore we need not urge them with violence now, but wait for a more convenient season.
2. Mildness, to speak without passion or provocation: *A soft tongue breaks the bone*; it mollifies the roughest spirits and overcomes those that are

most morose, like lightning, which, they say, has sometimes broken the bone, and yet not pierced the flesh. Gideon with a soft tongue pacified the Ephraimites and Abigail turned away David's wrath. *Hard words*, we say, *break no bones*, and therefore we should bear them patiently; but, it seems, *soft words* do, and therefore we should, on all occasions, give them prudently.

~~256~~ PROVERBS 25:16

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Here,

1. We are allowed a sober and moderate use of the delights of sense: *Hast thou found honey?* It is not forbidden fruit to thee, as it was to Jonathan; thou mayest eat of it with thanksgiving to God, who, having created things grateful to our senses, has given us leave to make use of them. *Eat as much as is sufficient*, and no more. *Enough is as good as a feast*.

2. We are cautioned to take heed of excess. We must use all pleasures as we do honey, with a check upon our appetite, lest we take more than does us good and make ourselves sick with it. We are most in danger of surfeiting upon that which is most sweet, and therefore those that fare sumptuously every day have need to watch over themselves, *lest their hearts be at any time overcharged*. The pleasures of sense lose their sweetness by the excessive use of them and become nauseous, as honey, which turns sour in the stomach; it is therefore our interest, as well as our duty, to use them with sobriety.

~~257~~ PROVERBS 25:17

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Here he mentions another pleasure which we must not take too much of, that of visiting our friends, the former for fear of surfeiting ourselves, this for fear of surfeiting our neighbour.

1. It is a piece of civility to visit our neighbours sometimes, to show our respect to them and concern for them, and to cultivate and improve mutual acquaintance and love, and that we may have both the satisfaction and advantage of their conversation.

2. It is wisdom, as well as good manners, not to be troublesome to our friends in our visiting them, not to visit too often, nor stay too long, nor contrive to come at meal-time, nor make ourselves busy in the affairs of their families; hereby we make ourselves cheap, mean, and burdensome. Thy neighbour, who is thus plagued and haunted with thy visits, will be *wearry of thee and hate thee*, and *that* will be the destruction of friendship which should have been the improvement of it. *Post tres saepe dies piscis vilescit et hospes* — *After the third day fish and company become distasteful*. Familiarity breeds contempt. *Nulli te facias nimis sodalem* — *Be not too intimate with any*. He that sponges upon his friend loses him. How much better a friend then is God than any other friend; for we need not withdraw our foot from his house, the throne of his grace (¹⁰⁸⁴Proverbs 8:34); the oftener we come to him the better and the more welcome.

~~1158~~ PROVERBS 25:18

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Here,

1. The sin condemned is *bearing false witness against our neighbour*, either in judgment or in common conversation, contrary to the law of the ninth commandment.

2. That which it is here condemned for is the mischievousness of it; it is in its power to ruin not only men's reputation, but their lives, estates, families, all that is dear to them. A false testimony is every thing that is dangerous; it is *a maul* (or *club* to knock a man's brains out with), a flail, which there is no fence against; it is *a sword* to wound near at hand and a *sharp arrow* to wound at a distance; we have therefore need to pray, *Deliver my soul, O Lord! from lying lips*, ¹⁰⁰²Psalm 120:2.

~~159~~ PROVERBS 25:19

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

1. The *confidence of an unfaithful man* (so some read it) will be *like a broken tooth*; his policy, his power, his interest, all that which he trusted in to support him in his wickedness, will fail him in time of trouble, ~~157~~ Psalm 52:7.

2. *Confidence in an unfaithful man* (so we read it), in a man whom we thought trusty and therefore depended on, but who proves otherwise; it proves not only unserviceable, but painful and vexatious, like a *broken tooth, or a foot out of joint*, which, when we put any stress upon it, not only fails us, but makes us feel from it, especially *in time of trouble*, when we most expect help from it; it is like a broken reed, ~~236~~ Isaiah 36:6. Confidence in a faithful God, in time of trouble, will not prove thus; on him we may rest and in him dwell at ease.

~~150~~ PROVERBS 25:20

FORGIVENESS OF ENEMIES

1. The absurdity here censured is *singing songs to a heavy heart*. Those that are in great sorrow are to be comforted by sympathizing with them, condoling with them, and concurring in their lamentation. If we take that method, the *moving of our lips may assuage their grief* (~~136~~ Job 16:5); but we take a wrong course with them if we think to relieve them by being merry with them, and endeavouring to make them merry; for it adds to their grief to see their friends so little concerned for them; it puts them upon ripping up the causes of their grief, and aggravating them, and makes them harden themselves in sorrow against the assaults of mirth.

2. The absurdities this is compared to are, *taking away a garment from a man in cold weather*, which makes him colder, and *pouring vinegar upon nitre*, which, like water upon lime, puts it into a ferment; so improper, so incongruous, is it to sing pleasant songs to one that is of a sorrowful spirit. Some read it in a contrary sense: *As he that puts on a garment in cold weather* warms the body, or as *vinegar upon nitre* dissolves it, so he that

sings songs of comfort to a person in sorrow refreshes him and dispels his grief.

~~152~~ PROVERBS 25:21-22

FORGIVENESS OF ENEMIES

By this it appears that, however the scribes and Pharisees had corrupted the law, not only the commandment of loving our brethren, but even that of loving our enemies, was not only a new, but also an old commandment, an Old-Testament commandment, though our Saviour has given it to us with the new enforcement of his own great example in loving us when we were enemies. Observe,

1. How we must express our love to our enemies by the real offices of kindness, even those that are expensive to ourselves and most acceptable to them: “If they be *hungry* and *thirsty*, instead of pleasing thyself with their distress and contriving how to cut off supplies from them, relieve them, as Elisha did the Syrians that came to apprehend him,” 2 King 6:22.

2. What encouragement we have to do so.

(1.) It will be a likely means to win upon them, and bring them over to be reconciled to us; we shall mollify them as the refiner melts the metal in the crucible, not only by putting it over the fire, but by heaping coals of fire upon it. The way to turn an enemy into a friend is, to act towards him in a friendly manner. If it do not gain him, it will aggravate his sin and punishment, and heap the burning coals of God's wrath upon his head, as rejoicing in his calamity may be an occasion of God's turning his wrath from him, ~~157~~ Proverbs 24:17.

(2.) However, we shall be no losers by our self-denial: “Whether he relent towards thee or no, *the Lord shall reward thee*; he shall forgive thee who thus showest thyself to be of a forgiving spirit. He shall provide for thee when thou art in distress (though thou hast been evil and ungrateful), as thou dost for thy enemy; at least it shall be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, when kindnesses done to our enemies shall be remembered as well as those shown to God's friends.”

~~3153~~ PROVERBS 25:23

FORGIVENESS OF ENEMIES

Here see,

1. How we must discourage sin and witness against it, and particularly the sin of slandering and backbiting; we must frown upon it, and, by giving it an angry countenance, endeavour to put it out of countenance. Slanders would not be so readily spoken as they are if they were not readily heard; but good manners would silence the slanderer if he saw that his tales displeased the company. We should show ourselves uneasy if we heard a dear friend, whom we value, evil-spoken of; the same dislike we should show of evil-speaking in general. If we cannot otherwise reprove, we may do it by our looks.

2. The good effect which this might probably have; who knows but it may silence and drive away a *backbiting tongue*? Sin, if it be countenanced, becomes daring, but, if it receive any check, it is so conscious of its own shame that it becomes cowardly, and this sin in particular, for many abuse those they speak of only in hopes to curry favour with those they speak to.

~~3154~~ PROVERBS 25:24

FORGIVENESS OF ENEMIES

This is the same with what he had said, ~~3119~~ Proverbs 21:9. Observe,

1. How those are to be pitied that are unequally yoked, especially with such as are brawling and contentious, whether husband or wife; for it is equally true of both. It is better to be alone than to be joined to one who, instead of being a meet-help, is a great hindrance to the comfort of life.

2. How those may sometimes be envied that live in solitude; as they want the comfort of society, so they are free from the vexation of it. And as there are cases which give occasion to say, “Blessed is the womb that has not borne,” so there are which give occasion to say, “Blessed is the man who was never married, but who lies like a servant in a *corner of the house-top*.”

PROVERBS 25:25

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

See here,

1. How natural it is to us to desire to hear good news from our friends, and concerning our affairs at a distance. It is sometimes with impatience that we expect to hear from abroad; our souls thirst after it. But we should check the inordinateness of that desire; if it be bad news, it will come too soon, if good, it will be welcome at any time.
2. How acceptable such good news will be when it does come, as refreshing as cold water to one that is thirsty. Solomon himself had much trading abroad, as well as correspondence by his ambassadors with foreign courts; and how pleasant it was to hear of the good success of his negotiations abroad he well knew by experience. Heaven is a country afar off; how refreshing is it to hear good news thence, both in the everlasting gospel, which signified glad tidings, and in the witness of the Spirit with our spirits that we are God's children.

PROVERBS 25:26

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

It is here represented as a very lamentable thing, and a public grievance, and of ill consequence to many, like the *troubling* of a *fountain* and the *corrupting* of a *spring*, for the righteous to *fall down before the wicked*, that is,

1. For the righteous to fall into sin in the sight of the wicked — for them to do any thing unbecoming their profession, which is *told in Gath*, and *published in the streets of Ashkelon*, and in which the *daughters of the Philistines rejoice*. For those that have been *in reputation for wisdom and honour* to fall from their excellency, this *troubles the fountains* by grieving some, and *corrupts the springs* by infecting others and emboldening them to do likewise.

2. For the righteous to be oppressed, and run down, and trampled upon, by the violence or subtlety of evil men, to be displaced and thrust into obscurity, this is the troubling of the fountains of justice and corrupting the very springs of government, ~~1182~~ Proverbs 28:12, 28; 29:2.

3. For the righteous to be cowardly, to truckle to the wicked, to be afraid of opposing his wickedness and basely to yield to him, this is a reflection upon religion, a discouragement to good men, and strengthens the hands of sinners in their sins, and so is like a *troubled fountain* and a *corrupt spring*.

~~1182~~ PROVERBS 25:27

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

I. Two things we must be graciously dead to: —

1. To the pleasures of sense, for *it is not good to eat much honey*; though it pleases the taste, and, if eaten with moderation, is very wholesome, yet, if eaten to excess, it becomes nauseous, creates bile, and is the occasion of many diseases. It is true of all the delights of the children of men that they will surfeit, but never satisfy, and they are dangerous to those that allow themselves the liberal use of them.

2. To the praise of man. We must not be greedy of that any more than of pleasure, because, *for men to search their own glory*, to court applause and covet to make themselves popular, is not their glory, but their shame; every one will laugh at them for it; and the glory which is so courted *is not glory* when it is got, for it is really no true honour to a man.

II. Some give another sense of this verse: *To eat much honey is not good*, but to search into glorious and excellent things is a great commendation, it is true glory; we cannot therein offend by excess. Others thus: “As honey, though pleasant to the taste, if used immoderately, oppresses the stomach, so an over-curious search into things sublime and glorious, though pleasant to us, if we pry too far, will overwhelm our capacities with a greater glory and lustre than they can bear.” Or thus: “You may be surfeited with eating too much honey, but the last of glory, of their glory,

the glory of the blessed, is glory; it will be ever fresh, and never pall the appetite.”

~~158~~ PROVERBS 25:28

MISCELLANEOUS MAXIMS

Here is,

- 1.** The good character of a wise and virtuous man implied. He is one that has *rule over his own spirit*; he maintains the government of himself, and of his own appetites and passions, and does not suffer them to rebel against reason and conscience. He has the rule of his own thoughts, his desires, his inclinations, his resentments, and keeps them all in good order.
- 2.** The bad case of a vicious man, who has not this rule over his own spirit, who, when temptations to excess in eating or drinking are before him, has no government of himself, when he is provoked breaks out into exorbitant passions, such a one is *like a city that is broken down and without walls*. All that is good goes out, and forsakes him; all that is evil breaks in upon him. He lies exposed to all the temptations of Satan and becomes an easy prey to that enemy; he is also liable to many troubles and vexations; it is likewise as much a reproach to him as it is to a city to have its walls ruined, Nehemiah 1.