

CHAPTER 12

PROVERBS 12:1

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

We are here taught to try whether we have grace or no by enquiring how we stand affected to the means of grace.

1. Those that have grace and love it will delight in all the instructions that are given them by way of counsel; admonition, or reproof, by the word or providence of God; they will value a good education, and think it not a hardship, but a happiness, to be under a strict and prudent discipline. Those that love a faithful ministry, that value it, and sit under it with pleasure, make it to appear that they *love knowledge*.

2. Those show themselves not only void of grace, but void of common sense, that take it as an affront to be told of their faults, and an imposition upon their liberty to be put in mind of their duty: *He that hates reproof is not only foolish, but brutish*, like the horse and the mule that have no understanding, or the ox that kicks against the goad. Those that desire to live in loose families and societies, where they may be under no check, that stifle the convictions of their own consciences, and count those their enemies that tell them the truth, are the *brutish* here meant.

PROVERBS 12:2

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Note,

1. We are really as we are with God. Those are happy, truly happy, for ever happy, that *obtain favour of the Lord*, though the world frown upon them, and they find little favour with men; for in God's favour is life, and that is the fountain of all good. On the other hand those are miserable

whom *he condemns*, however men may applaud them, and cry them up; whom he condemns he condemns to the second death.

2. We are with God as we are with men, as we have our conversation in this world. Our Father judges of his children very much by their conduct one to another; and therefore *a good man*, that is merciful, and charitable, and does good, *draws out favour from the Lord* by his prayers; but a malicious man, that devises wickedness against his neighbours, *he will condemn*, as unworthy of a place in his kingdom.

PROVERBS 12:3

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Note,

1. Though men may advance themselves by sinful arts, they cannot by such arts settle and secure themselves; though they may get large estates they cannot get such as will abide: *A man shall not be established by wickedness*; it may set him in high places, but they are slippery places, ~~PS~~ Psalm 73:18. That prosperity which is raised by sin is built on the sand, and so it will soon appear.

2. Though good men may have but little of the world, yet that little will last, and what is honestly got will wear well: *The root of the righteous shall not be moved*, though their branches may be shaken. Those that by faith are rooted in Christ are firmly fixed; in him their comfort and happiness are so rooted as never to be rooted up.

PROVERBS 12:4

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Note,

1. He that is blessed with a good wife is as happy as if he were upon the throne, for she is no less than *a crown* to him. *A virtuous woman*, that is pious and prudent, ingenious and industrious, that is active for the good of her family and looks well to the ways of her household, that makes

conscience of her duty in every relation, a woman of spirit, that can bear crosses without disturbance, such a one owns her husband for her head, and therefore she *is a crown* to him, not only a credit and honour to him, as *a crown* is an ornament, but supports and keeps up his authority in his family, as *a crown* is an ensign of power. She is submissive and faithful to him and by her example teaches his children and servants to be so too.

2. He that is plagued with a bad wife is as miserable as if he were upon the dunghill; for she is no better than *rottenness in his bones*, an incurable disease, besides that *she makes him ashamed*. She that is silly and slothful, wasteful and wanton, passionate and ill-tongued, ruins both the credit and comfort of her husband. If he go abroad, his head is hung down, for his wife's faults turn to his reproach. If he retire into himself, his heart is sunk; he is continually uneasy; it is an affliction that preys much upon the spirits.

PROVERBS 12:5

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Note,

- 1.** The word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and judges them. We mistake if we imagine that thoughts are free. No, they are under the divine cognizance, and therefore under the divine command.
- 2.** We ought to be observers of the thoughts and intents of our own hearts,, hearts, and to judge of ourselves by them; for they are the first-born of the soul, that have most of its image undisguised. Right thoughts are a righteous man's best evidences, as nothing more certainly proves a man wicked than wicked contrivances and designs. A good man may have in his mind bad suggestions, but he does not indulge them and harbour them till they are ripened into bad projects and resolutions.
- 3.** It is a man's honour to mean honestly, and to have his thoughts right, though a word or action may be misplaced, or mistimed, or at least misinterpreted. But it is a man's shame to lie always at catch, to act with deceit, with trick and design, not only with a long reach, but with an overreach.

~~106~~ PROVERBS 12:6

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

In the foregoing verse the *thoughts* of the wicked and righteous were compared; here their *words*, and those are as the abundance of the heart is.

1. Wicked people speak mischief to their neighbours; and wicked indeed those are whose *words* are to *lie in wait for blood*; their tongues are swords to those that stand in their way, to good men whom they hate and persecute. See an instance, ~~107~~ Luke 20:20, 21.

2. Good men speak help to their neighbours: The *mouth of the upright* is ready to be opened in the cause of those that are oppressed (~~108~~ Proverbs 31:8), to plead for them, to witness for them, and so to *deliver them*, particularly those whom the wicked *lie in wait* for. A man may sometimes do a very good work with one good word.

~~109~~ PROVERBS 12:7

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

We are here taught as before (v. 3 and ~~105~~ Proverbs 10:25, 30),

1. That the *triumphing of the wicked is short*. They may be exalted for a while, but in a little time they are *overthrown and are not*; their trouble proves their overthrow, and those who made a great show disappear, and their place knows them no more. *Turn the wicked, and they are not*; they stand in such a slippery place that the least touch of trouble brings them down, like the apples of Sodom, which look fair, but touch them and they go to dust.

2. That the prosperity of the righteous has a good bottom and will endure. Death will remove them, but their *house shall stand*, their families shall be kept up, and the generation of the upright shall be blessed.

PROVERBS 12:8

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

We are here told whence to expect a good name. Reputation is what most have a high regard to and stand much upon. Now it is certain,

1. The best reputation is that which attends virtue and serious piety, and the prudent conduct of life: *A man shall be commended* by all that are wise and good, in conformity to the judgment of God himself, which we are sure is *according to truth*, not according to his riches or preferments, his craft and subtlety, but *according to his wisdom*, the honesty of his designs and the prudent choice of means to compass them.

2. The worst reproach is that which follows wickedness and an opposition to that which is good: *He that is of a perverse heart*, that turns aside to crooked ways, and goes on frowardly in them, *shall be despised*. Providence will bring him to poverty and contempt, and all that have a true sense of honour will despise him as unworthy to be dealt with and unfit to be trusted, as a blemish and scandal to mankind.

PROVERBS 12:9

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Note,

1. It is the folly of some that they covet to make a great figure abroad, take place, and take state, as persons of quality, and yet want necessaries at home, and, if their debts were paid, would not be worth a morsel of bread, nay, perhaps, pinch their bellies to put it on their backs, that they may appear very gay, because fine feathers make fine birds.

2. The condition and character of those is every way better who content themselves in a lower sphere, where they are despised for the plainness of their dress and the meanness of their post, that they may be able to afford themselves, not only necessaries, but conveniences, in their own houses, not only bread, but a servant to attend them and take some of their work off their hands. Those that contrive to live plentifully and comfortably at

home are to be preferred before those that affect nothing so much as to appear splendid abroad, though they have not wherewithal to maintain their appearance, whose hearts are unhumiliated when their condition is low.

<121> PROVERBS 12:10

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

See here,

1. To how great a degree a good man will be merciful; he has not only a compassion for the human nature under its greatest abasements, but he regards even *the life of his beast*, not only because it is his servant, but because it is God's creature, and in conformity to Providence, which *preserves man and beast*. The beasts that are under our care must be provided for, must have convenient food and rest, must in no case be abused or tyrannised over. Balaam was checked for beating his ass. The law took care for oxen. Those therefore are unrighteous men that are not just to the brute-creatures; those that are furious and barbarous to them evidence, and confirm in themselves, a habit of barbarity, and help to make the creation groan, <882> Romans 8:22.

2. To how great a degree a wicked man will be unmerciful; even his *tender mercies* are *cruel*; that natural compassion which is in him, as a man, is lost, and, by the power of corruption, is turned into hard-heartedness; even that which they will have to pass for compassion is really cruel, as Pilate's resolution concerning Christ the innocent, *I will chastise him and let him go*. Their pretended kindnesses are only a cover for purposed cruelties.

<121> PROVERBS 12:11

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Note,

1. It is men's wisdom to mind their business and follow an honest calling, for that is the way, by the blessing of God, to get a livelihood: *He that tills his land*, of which he is either the owner or the occupant, that keeps to his

word and is willing to take pains, if he do not raise an estate by it (what need is there of that?), yet he *shall be satisfied with bread*, shall have food convenient for himself and his family, enough to bear his charges comfortably through the world. Even the sentence of wrath has this mercy in it, Thou shalt *eat bread*, though it be *in the sweat of thy face*. Cain was denied this, ~~4012~~Genesis 4:12. Be busy, and that is the true way to be easy. Keep thy shop and thy shop will keep thee. *Thou shalt eat the labour of thy hands*.

2. It is men's folly to neglect their business. Those are *void of understanding* that do so, for then they fall in with idle companions and follow them in their evil courses, and so come to want bread, at least bread of their own, and make themselves burdensome to others, eating the bread out of other people's mouths.

~~4122~~PROVERBS 12:12

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

See here,

1. What is the care and aim of a wicked man; he would do mischief: He *desires the net of evil men*. “Oh that I were but as cunning as such a man, to make a hand of those I deal with, that I had but his art of over-reaching, that I could but take my revenge on one I have spite to as effectually as he can!” He desires the *strong-hold, or fortress*, of evil men (so some read it), to act securely in doing mischief, that it may not turn upon him.

2. What is the care and aim of a good man: His *root yields fruit*, and is his strength and stability, and that is it that he desires, to do good and to be fixed and confirmed in doing good. The wicked desires only a net wherewith to fish for himself; the righteous desires to yield fruit for the benefit of others and God's glory, ~~546~~Romans 14:6.

PROVERBS 12:13

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

See here,

1. The wicked entangling themselves in trouble by their folly, when God in justice leaves them to themselves. They are often *snared by the transgression of their lips* and their throats are cut with their own tongues. By *speaking evil of dignities* they expose themselves to public justice; by giving ill language they become obnoxious to private resentments, are sued for defamation, and actions on the case for words are brought against them. Many a man has paid dearly in this world for the transgression of his lips, and has felt the lash on his back for want of a bridle upon his tongue, ¹⁶⁶⁸Psalm 64:8.

2. The righteous extricating themselves out of trouble by their own wisdom, when God in mercy comes in for their succour: *The just shall come out* of such troubles as the wicked throw themselves headlong into. It is intimated that the just may perhaps come into trouble; but, *though they fall, they shall not be utterly cast down*, ¹³⁸⁹Psalm 34:19.

PROVERBS 12:14

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

We are here assured, for our quickening to every good word and work,

1. That even good words will turn to a good account (v. 14): *A man shall be satisfied with good* (that is, he shall gain present comfort, that inward pleasure which is truly satisfying) *by the fruit of his mouth*, by the good he does with his pious discourse and prudent advice. While we are teaching others we may ourselves learn, and feed on the bread of life we break to others.

2. That good works, much more, will be abundantly rewarded: *The recompence of a man's hands* for all his work and labour of love, all he has done for the glory of God and the good of his generation, *shall be rendered unto him*, and he shall reap as he has sown. Or it may be

understood of the general rule of justice; God will *render to every man according to his work*, ^{<116}Romans 2:6.

<115> PROVERBS 12:15

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

See here,

1. What it is that keeps a fool from being wise: *His way is right in his own eyes*; he thinks he is in the right in every thing he does, and *therefore* asks no advice, because he does not apprehend he needs it; he is confident he knows the way, and cannot miss it, and therefore never enquires the way. The rule he goes by is to do that which is *right in his own eyes*, to walk in the way of his heart. *Quicquid libet, licet* — *He makes his will his law*. He is a fool that is governed by his eye, and not by his conscience.

2. What it is that keeps a wise man from being a fool; he is willing to be advised, desires to have counsel given him, and *hearkens to counsel*, being diffident of his own judgment and having a value for the direction of those that are wise and good. He is wise (it is a sign he is so, and he is likely to continue so) whose ear is always open to good advice.

<116> PROVERBS 12:16

ADVANTAGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Note,

1. Passion is folly: *A fool is known by his anger* (so some read it); not but that a wise man may be angry when there is just cause for it, but then he has his anger under check and direction, is *lord of his anger*, whereas a fool's anger lords it over him. He that, when he is provoked, breaks out into indecent expressions, in words or behaviour, whose passion alters his countenance, makes him outrageous, and leads him to forget himself, *Nabal* certainly is his name and *folly is with him*. *A fool's indignation is known in the day*; he proclaims it openly, whatever company he is in. Or it is known in the day he is provoked; he cannot defer showing his

resentments. Those that are soon angry, that are quickly put into a flame by the least spark, have not that rule which they ought to have over their own spirits.

2. Meekness is wisdom: *A prudent man covers shame.*

(1.) He covers the passion that is in his own breast; when his *spirit is stirred*, and his *heart hot within him*, he keeps his mouth as with a bridle, and suppresses his resentments, by smothering and stifling them. Anger is shame, and, though a wise man be not perfectly free from it, yet he is ashamed of it, rebukes it, and suffers not the evil spirit to speak.

(2.) He covers the provocation that is given him, the indignity that is done him, winks at it, covers it as much as may be from himself, that he may not carry his resentments of it too far. It is a kindness to ourselves, and contributes to the repose of our own minds, to extenuate and excuse the injuries and affronts that we receive, instead of aggravating them and making the worst of them, as we are apt to do.

~~417~~ PROVERBS 12:17

TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD

Here is,

1. A faithful witness commended for an honest man. *He that makes conscience of speaking truth*, and representing every thing fairly, to the best of his knowledge, whether in judgment or in common conversation, whether he be upon his oath or no, he *shows forth righteousness*; he makes it to appear that he is governed and actuated by the principles and laws of righteousness, and he promotes justice by doing honour to it and serving the administration of it.

2. A false witness condemned for a cheat; he *shows forth deceit*, not only how little conscience he makes of deceiving those he deals with, but how much pleasure he takes in it, and that he is possessed by a lying spirit, ~~400~~ Jeremiah 9:3-5. We are all concerned to possess ourselves with a dread and detestation of the sin of lying (~~406~~ Psalm 119:163) and with a reigning principle of honesty.

PROVERBS 12:18

TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD

The tongue is death or life, poison or medicine, as it is used.

1. There are words that are cutting and killing, that are *like the piercings of a sword*. Opprobrious words grieve the spirits of those to whom they are spoken, and cut them to the heart. Slanders, like a sword, wound the reputation of those of whom they are uttered, and perhaps incurably. Whisperings and evil surmises, like a sword, divide and cut asunder the bounds of love and friendship, and separate those that have been dearest to each other.

2. There are words that are curing and healing: *The tongue of the wise is health*, closing up those wounds which the backbiting tongue had given, making all whole again, restoring peace, and accommodating matters in variance and persuading to reconciliation. Wisdom will find out proper remedies against the mischiefs that are made by detraction and evil-speaking.

PROVERBS 12:19

TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD

Be it observed, to the honour of truth, that sacred thing,

1. That, if truth be spoken, it will hold good, and, whoever may be disobliged by it and angry at it, yet it will keep its ground. Great is the truth and will prevail. What is true will be always true; we may abide by it, and need not fear being disproved and put to shame.

2. That, if truth be denied, yet in time it will transpire. A *lying tongue*, that puts false colours upon things, *is but for a moment*. The lie will be disproved. The liar, when he comes to be examined, will be found in several stories, and not consistent with himself as he is that speaks truth; and, when he is found in a lie, he cannot gain his point, nor will he afterwards be credited. Truth may be eclipsed, but it will come to light. Those therefore that make a lie their refuge will find it a refuge of lies.

~~<120>~~ PROVERBS 12:20

TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD

Note,

1. Those that devise mischief contrive, for the accomplishing of it, how to impose upon others; but it will prove, in the end, that they deceive themselves. Those that *imagine evil*, under colour of friendship, have their hearts full of this and the other advantage and satisfaction which they shall gain by it, but it is all a cheat. Let them imagine it ever so artfully, deceivers will be deceived.

2. Those that consult the good of their neighbours, that study the things which make for peace and give peaceable advice, promote healing attempts and contrive healing methods, and, according as their sphere is, further the public welfare, will have not only the credit, but the comfort of it. They will have joy and success, perhaps beyond their expectation. *Blessed are the peace-makers.*

~~<121>~~ PROVERBS 12:21

WEIGHTY SAYINGS

Note,

1. Piety is a sure protection. If men be sincerely righteous, the righteous God has engaged that no evil shall happen to them. He will, by the power of his grace in them, that principle of justice, keep them from the evil of sin; so that, though they be tempted, yet they shall not be overcome by the temptation, and though they may come into trouble, into many troubles, yet to them those troubles shall have no evil in them, whatever they have to others (~~<910>~~ Psalm 91:10), for they shall be overruled to work for their good.

2. Wickedness is as sure a destruction. Those that live in contempt of God and man, that are set on mischief, with mischief they *shall be filled*. They shall be more mischievous, shall be *filled with all unrighteousness*, ~~<812>~~ Romans 1:29. Or they shall be made miserable with the mischiefs that

shall come upon them. Those that delight in mischief shall have enough of it. Some read the whole verse thus, *There shall no evil happen to the just, though the wicked be filled with mischief* and spite against them. They shall be safe under the protection of Heaven, though hell itself break loose upon them.

~~122~~ PROVERBS 12:22

WEIGHTY SAYINGS

We are here taught,

- 1.** To hate lying, and to keep at the utmost distance from it, because it is an abomination to the Lord, and renders those abominable in his sight that allow themselves in it, not only because it is a breach of his law, but because it is destructive to human society.
- 2.** To make conscience of truth, not only in our words, but in all our actions, because those that *deal truly* and sincerely in all their dealings are *his delight*, and he is well pleased with them. We delight to converse with, and make use of, those that are honest and that we may put a confidence in; such therefore let us be, that we may recommend ourselves to the favour both of God and man.

~~123~~ PROVERBS 12:23

WEIGHTY SAYINGS

Note,

- 1.** He that is wise does not affect to proclaim his wisdom, and it is his honour that he does not. He communicates his knowledge when it may turn to the edification of others, but he conceals it when the showing of it would only tend to his own commendation. Knowing men, if they be prudent men, will carefully avoid every thing that savours of ostentation, and not take all occasions to show their learning and reading, but only to use it for good purposes, and then let *their own works praise them*. *Ars est celare artem* — *The perfection of art is to conceal it.*

2. He that is foolish cannot avoid proclaiming his folly, and it is his shame that he cannot: *The heart of fools*, by their foolish words and actions, *proclaims foolishness*; either they do not desire to hide it, so little sense have they of good and evil, honour and dishonour, or they know not how to hide it, so little discretion have they in the management of themselves, ^{<1103>}Ecclesiastes 10:3.

^{<1124>}PROVERBS 12:24

WEIGHTY SAYINGS

Note,

1. Industry is the way to preferment. Solomon advanced Jeroboam because he saw that he was an industrious young man, and minded his business, ^{<1118>}1 Kings 11:28. Men that take pains in study and serviceableness will thereby gain such an interest and reputation as will give them a dominion over all about them, by which means many have risen strangely. He that has been *faithful in a few things* shall be made *ruler over many things*. The elders, that *labour in the word and doctrine*, are *worthy of double honour*; and those that are diligent when they are young will get that which will enable them to rule, and so to rest, when they are old.

2. Knavery is the way to slavery: *The slothful* and careless, or rather the *deceitful* (for so the word signifies), *shall be under tribute*. Those that, because they will not take pains in an honest calling, live by their shifts and arts of dishonesty, are paltry and beggarly, and will be kept under. Those that are diligent and honest when they are apprentices will come to be masters; but those that are otherwise are the fools who, all their days, must be *servants to the wise in heart*.

^{<1125>}PROVERBS 12:25

WEIGHTY SAYINGS

Here is,

1. The cause and consequence of melancholy. It is *heaviness in the heart*; it is a load of care, and fear, and sorrow, upon the spirits, depressing them,

and disabling them to exert themselves with any vigour on what is to be done or fortitude in what is to borne; it makes them stoop, prostrates and sinks them. Those that are thus oppressed can neither do the duty nor take the comfort of any relation, condition, or conversation. Those therefore that are inclined to it should watch and pray against it.

2. The cure of it: *A good word from God, applied by faith, makes it glad;* such a word is that (says one of the rabbin), *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee;* the good word of God, particularly the gospel, is designed to make the hearts glad that are weary and heavy-laden, ⁴¹¹⁸Matthew 11:28. Ministers are to be helpers of this joy.

~~4126~~ PROVERBS 12:26

MORAL MAXIMS

See here,

1. That good men do well for themselves; for they have in themselves an excellent character, and they secure to themselves an excellent portion, and in both they excel other people: *The righteous is more abundant than his neighbour* (so the margin); he is richer, though not in this world's goods, yet in the graces and comforts of the Spirit, which are the true riches. There is a true excellency in religion; it ennobles men, inspires them with generous principles, makes them substantial; it is an excellency which is, in the sight of God, of great price, who is the true Judge of excellency. His neighbour may make a greater figure in the world, may be more applauded, but the righteous man has the intrinsic worth.

2. That wicked men do ill for themselves; they walk in a way which *seduces them*. It seems to them to be not only a pleasant way, but the right way; it is so agreeable to flesh and blood that they therefore flatter themselves with an opinion that it cannot be amiss, but they will not gain the point they aim at, nor enjoy the good they hope for. It is all a cheat; and therefore the righteous is wiser and happier than his neighbour, that yet despise him and trample upon him.

PROVERBS 12:27

MORAL MAXIMS

Here is,

1. That which may make us hate slothfulness and deceit, for the word here, as before, signifies both: *The slothful deceitful man* has roast meat, but that which he roasts is not what he himself *took in hunting*, no, it is what others took pains for, and he lives upon the fruit of their labours, like the drones in the hive. Or, if slothful deceitful men have taken any thing by hunting (as sportsmen are seldom men of business), yet they do not roast it when they have taken it; they have no comfort in the enjoyment of it; perhaps God in his providence cuts them short of it.
2. That which may make us in love with industry and honesty, that the *substance of a diligent man*, though it be not great perhaps, *is yet precious*. It comes from the blessing of God; he has comfort in it; it does him good, and his family. It is his own daily bread, not bread out of other people's mouths, and therefore he sees God gives it to him in answer to his prayer.

PROVERBS 12:28

MORAL MAXIMS

The way of religion is here recommended to us,

1. As a straight, plain, easy way; it is *the way of righteousness*. God's commands (the rule we are to walk by) are all holy, just, and good. Religion has right reason and equity on its side; it is a *path-way*, a way which God has cast up for us (²³⁸⁸Isaiah 35:8); it is a highway, the king's highway, the King of kings' highway, a way which is tracked before us by all the saints, the good old way, full of the footsteps of the flock.
 2. As a safe, pleasant, comfortable way.
- (1.) There is not only life at the end, but there is life in the way; all true comfort and satisfaction. The favour of God, which is better than life; the Spirit, who is life.

(2.) There is not only life in it, but so as that in it *there is no death*, none of that sorrow of the world which works death and is an allay to our present joy and life. There is no end of that life that is in the way of righteousness. Here there is life, but there is death too. *In the way of righteousness there is life, and no death*, life and immortality.