

PROVERBS 12

THE LORD'S FAVOR AND A GOOD WORD

Love of instruction vs. hatred of reproof (verse 1)

“Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish.”

Instruction, as we gather from the contrast, chiefly implies *discipline*, which is a very necessary course for acquiring spiritual knowledge. So contrary is this knowledge to our proud hearts, that the submission of the will to Christ is our only road to attain it. Yet the value of this attainment abundantly covers the cost! A faithful Gospel-ministry, therefore, is a most valuable blessing. And indeed, all instructive discipline deserves to be loved as the way of life.

To hate reproof – as if it were an affront to be told of our faults – discloses not only a lack of grace, but also an absence of understanding. It reveals brutish folly – like an unruly horse or mule, which bites and kicks at the man who performs a painful operation upon him, even though it is absolutely necessary for removing a dangerous distemper. Surely he is a brute beast, and not a rational creature, who has swallowed poison – but who would rather allow it to take its deadly course, than to admit the necessary relief of medicine, lest he should be obliged to confess his folly in exposing himself to the need of it. O for a teachable spirit, to “sit at the feet” of our Divine Master and learn from Him!

Obtaining the Lord's favor (verse 2)

“A good man obtaineth favor of the Lord: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn.”

Goodness is “the fruit of the Spirit.” A “good man,” therefore, is a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit. He reflects the magnanimous goodness of God. He is not only the subject of grace, but He is also a dispenser of it. He is not only enriched with all blessings for himself, but he is also enabled to bestow bountifulness upon his fellow-creatures. And thus, as a benefactor to mankind, he commands our devoted gratitude. But as a far richer reward of grace (and not of debt), he also “obtaineth favor of the Lord.” What are all this world's treasures compared with that? This favor is the joy of our salvation, our soothing mercy, our covering shield in the near prospect of eternity, and our absorbing interest. And if here, in a world of sin, this favor is “better than life”; then what will the unclouded sunshine be like – “the path of life,” “the fulness of joy in his heavenly presence,” and “the pleasures at his right hand for evermore”?

The contrast to the good man is the person who is full of wicked devices. He lives in them as his element; his mind is set upon them. He contrives them. He follows them as his course and delight. And instead of favor, this verse utters a condemnation that is justly merited. He is “condemned already.” In fact, the sting of his conscience and the curse of God are *present* condemnation! But what will it be like, when the All-seeing Judge “shall be a swift witness against him”?

Kindness even to animals (verse 10)

“A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.”

The minuteness of Scripture is one of its most valuable properties. It shows the mind of the Lord on many points which are apparently trivial. Here it tests our profession of faith by our treatment of animals! They have been given to man – the steward of God’s Creation – for his use, comfort, and food; they were not given to him for his cruelty to be exercised upon. A righteous man properly attends to the comfort of his animals, and never presses them beyond their strength. But why is this act of humanity marked as a feature of a righteous person? Because it represents the image of our heavenly Father, Who spreads His cherishing wings over His whole creation! As if the field of man was too small for His goodness, He also regards the life of animals. Must not His children, then, reflect His whole image of love?

A good word (verse 25)

“Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad.”

This maxim points out an easy and cheap way of being useful – by the cheering efficacy of a good word to a stooping heart! And how full is the Gospel of these good words! Are we distressed for sin? “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest.” Are we pressured by affliction? How good is the word “that speaketh unto us, as unto children” – reminding us to neither despair nor faint under “the chastening of the Lord.” Are we in the depths of despondency? This good word is repeated often: “Fear not!” Human sympathy may indeed give temporary relief. But these healing words are the grace – softer than oil, and sweeter than roses – which flows from the Savior’s lips into the sinner’s wounds. O how sweet is the voice of pardon to a soul that is groaning under the burden of sin! If it had not been for the Lord’s good words, David “would have perished in his affliction.” What else but good words, spoken from God’s messengers, made the Philippian jailor’s drooping heart glad? Precious, indeed, is the privilege when a believer strengthens the weak hands of a brother or sister with a good word from God. Precious is the ministry of the Gospel, which is commissioned with the gladdening word to those who have heavy hearts. Yet even more precious is the office of our beloved Savior, Who was gifted with “the tongue of the learned,” and filled with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, for the express purpose of “comforting them that mourn.” What a blessed obligation and privilege we have, therefore, to “rejoice in the Lord!”



Lord, we repent of instances in our lives where we have hated reproof. Give us a teachable spirit, to sit at Your feet and learn to love Your instruction! Amen.