

A Plea for the Godly

by Thomas Watson

A righteous man is more excellent than any wicked person in the world, due to his superior wisdom, beauty, discourse, spirit, and prayers.

Scripture: Job 17:9, Psalm 24:3, Proverbs 12:26, Malachi 1:13, Acts 20:23, Romans 7:22, Titus 2:11

Topics: "Christian Living", "Righteousness"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches about the characteristics of a righteous man, emphasizing the importance of humility, holiness, justice, love, and perseverance in one's faith. He highlights that a righteous person is humble, devoted to holiness, just in dealings, serves God out of love, and perseveres in piety despite challenges. Watson stresses that righteousness is not just about outward appearance but about the heart's transformation and genuine love for God and others.

Transcript

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"The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor." Proverbs 12:26

Solomon was a man of renown. He was the world's wonder; he discoursed on trees from the cedar-tree in Lebanon, to the hyssop which springs out of the wall. The Proverbs are profound and holy aphorisms, inspired by the Spirit of God and penned by him who was both a king and a preacher. A great part of this book is to set forth the differences between the godly and the wicked, the happiness of the one and the misery of the other. The text is spoken in the eulogy and commendation of a righteous man: "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor."

1. I begin with the first word, "righteous". There is a twofold righteousness:

1. There is a CIVIL or MORAL righteousness. He is morally righteous, who is adorned with the moral virtues: prudence, justice, and temperance; who keeps free from breaking penal statutes, and does not dash upon the rock of visible scandal. This righteousness is valid in man's court--but is insufficient to salvation. Under the fair leaves of civility and morality--the worm of unbelief may be hidden. Many a person who is decked with morality, is now descended into hell-fire. A bull may be tied with ribbons and wear a garland on his head--yet go to the slaughter. "He saved us--not by works of righteousness that we

had done--but according to His mercy." Titus 3:5

However, for the good of this age, it were to be wished that there were more moral righteousness to be found in the world.

2. There is a GOSPEL righteousness, which is first an IMPUTED righteousness, namely, when Christ's righteousness is made over to us. In Adam, in whom "all have sinned"--we were all criminal persons. Romans 5:12. If the head plots treason, all the body is guilty as well. "But Christ is made to us righteousness," 1 Corinthians 1:30. Indeed, it is only in this righteousness, which we can stand before the justice of God. This is the name whereby He shall be called, "The Lord our righteousness," Jeremiah 23:6. This righteousness is a coat without seam, which not only covers but adorns us. This is as truly our righteousness to justify us--as it is Christ's righteousness to bestow.

There is an IMPARTED righteousness, which is the infusing the seed and habit of grace in the soul, making a person internally holy. And so he is said to be righteous who has a change of heart wrought in him and is transformed by the renewing of his mind, Romans 12:2. Such a one, though he is not another man, yet he is a new man, 2 Corinthians 5:17. The faculties are not new but the desires and affections are--as the strings of a violin are the same--but the tune is altered.

Righteousness is extensive in the subject; it has a spreading virtue. "The God of peace sanctify you wholly," 1 Thessalonians 5:23. A child of God is regenerate in every part--though but in part.

2. "He is more excellent." Excellency is the ennobling of a person, or a gradual elevation of him above others. The righteous man is more excellent; that is, he is a better man. The word for "excellent", in the Hebrew signifies abundant. It is as if the Spirit of God had said, "The righteous has more abundant worth in him, more intrinsic goodness."

3. "Than his neighbor." "Neighbor" is not to be taken here strictly for one who lives in a vicinity and is nearly situated; but by neighbor is meant anyone who is unrighteous, and does not have the fear of God before his eyes.

"The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor." Solomon seems, as it were, to put the righteous and the wicked in a pair of scales; the one weighs as weighty gold; the other weighs lighter than the dust of the balance!

DOCTRINE. He who is truly righteous, is far more excellent than any wicked person in the world. I say "truly righteous" to exclude the hypocrite who has a form and slight tincture of piety--but does not know "the grace of God in truth," Colossians 1:6. He has nothing of religion--but the name; and reputation of true religion often suffers by him. But he who is really righteous, is the excellent person and has a superiority to all others.

For the illustrating of the proposition, I shall do two things. I shall show:

First, HOW the righteous man is more excellent.

Second, WHY the righteous man is more excellent

1. HOW a righteous man is more excellent than another. This appears three ways in respect of:

1. What he is.

2. What he has.

3. What he shall have.

1. A righteous man is more excellent than a wicked man--in respect of what he IS.

1. He is more richly endued with WISDOM. He is of a dexterous sagacity, mixing the serpent's cunning with the dove's innocence. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. We who have the Spirit understand these things," 1 Corinthians 2:14-15. As the soul in the eye is the cause why it sees, so the Spirit of God in the mind is the cause why it savingly understands. The anointing of the Holy Spirit is irradiating; it clears a Christian's eyesight. "His anointing teaches you about all things," 1 John 2:27. The saints are compared to wise virgins. Sensualists often have a greater reach in matters of the world--but they have no insight into the deep things of God, 1 Corinthians 2:14. A swine may see an acorn on the ground--but it cannot see a star. David, being divinely illuminated, grew wiser than his teachers, Psalm 119:99. A righteous man is wise:

(1) To know himself. Take the most keen wit, the most sharp politician who is able to dive into the mysteries of state--yet he is ignorant of his own heart. There are those meanderings and windings, those intrinsic pollutions, which he cannot find out. He dresses himself by the mirror of self-love. He does not see the evil that is in him, nor will he believe it. Hazael could not imagine he could be so bad when he came to be king, 2 Kings 8:13.

But a spiritually-enlightened soul sees that which the natural man does not see. He sees legions of vain thoughts. He sees how his grace is choked with corruption, his humility is stained with pride, his faith mixed with unbelief. His very pious duties are but shining sins. He sees so much of his deceitful heart, that he dare not trust it.

(2) A righteous man is wise to know Jesus Christ. The natural man hears of Christ by the hearing of the ear--but he does not know Him. "What, is your beloved more than another beloved?" Those who journeyed with Paul heard a voice--but saw no man, Acts 9:7. So the unregenerate person hears the minister set forth Christ as altogether lovely; he hears a voice but sees no man. He does not see Christ's magnificent beauties. Christ is a treasure--but a hidden treasure. But a gracious soul has the veil taken off; he sees the amazing excellencies of Christ. "Unto you therefore who believe--He is precious!" 2 Peter 2:7. His merits, graces, and benefits are precious. A righteous man has Christ's eye-salve to see his tried gold, Revelation 3:18. If a carnal man could see with a spiritual man's eyes, he would wonder at those surpassing beauties in Jesus Christ, which he now makes light of.

(3) A righteous man is wise to discern the times. The children of Issachar were men who had understanding of the times. The world cries out, "Glorious times!" but a righteous man has an eye of discernment. He can see when the wicked make void God's law and when religion is crucified by those who cry "hosanna" to it. He is wise to keep from the contagion of the times. "These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes." Revelation 14:2. A person divinely qualified is wiser than to run himself into snares or go to hell for company; he is wise to salvation. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His instructions have good insight." Psalm 111:10

2. A righteous man is of a more excellent BIRTH. Alexander the Great made himself out to be the son to Jupiter. Every Christian is high-born; he is born of God, and that is more than to come from princes and be of the royal blood. David thought it no small honor to be the king's son-in-law, 1 Samuel 18:18. Oh, what an infinite honor it is, to be regenerated by the Spirit and enrolled among the first-born of heaven! The righteous man derives his pedigree from the Ancient of Days, Daniel 7:9. He is near akin to the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Isaiah 40:31.

3. A righteous person is of a more excellent BEAUTY. Worldly beauty is courted by all--but what is it? "Beauty is vain!" Proverbs 31:30. The finest features of the body, and the most lovely face--are nothing other than well-colored dirt! But a righteous person has a celestial beauty shining in him. He is embellished with knowledge, love, and meekness, which are of such splendor as to allure the very angels! A godly Christian has some idea and resemblance of that sparkling holiness which is in the Deity. Christ is infinitely taken with the spiritual beauty of His church. "You are beautiful, O my love!" Song of Solomon 6:4. "Turn away your eyes from me--for they have overcome me." verse 5. It is as if Christ had said, "Oh, My spouse, such a resplendent luster is in your countenance that I can hardly bear it. I am wounded with the delightful darts of your beauty!" One eye of a believer draws Christ's heart to it. "You have ravished My heart with one of your eyes!" Song of Solomon 4:9 A saint's beauty never withers; it outlives death. True grace is like colors laid in oil, which cannot be washed off.

4. A righteous man's THOUGHTS are more excellent. Thoughts are the firstborn of the soul; sinful thoughts arise out of a bad heart, like sparks out of a furnace. An unsanctified mind, is Satan's work-house. Micah 2:1, "Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds!" "The thoughts of the righteous are just," Proverbs 12:5. A righteous man's thoughts have wings, and fly to heaven. "When I awake, I am still with You," Psalm 139:18. God is a saint's treasure--and where should his mind be but upon this treasure? A righteous man's thoughts ascend to heaven, as he solaces himself in Jehovah. He contemplates the beauty of holiness, the love of Christ, the felicity of glorified saints. His thoughts are among the cherubim! The soul, while it is musing on Christ, is filled with holy and sweet raptures. It is caught up into paradise. It is in heaven, before its time. "My meditation of Him shall be sweet!"

5. A righteous man's DESIRES are more excellent. He spreads the sails of his desire to receive the fresh breathings of God's Spirit. I do not deny that a wicked man may have some faint aspirings after the best things. Those deserters of Christ cried, "Lord, give us this bread always," John 6:34. But a righteous man's desires excel.

He desires Christ for Himself--not only for His jewels--but His beauty; not only as He is a Savior--but as He is the Holy One, Acts 3:14.

He is unsatisfied without Christ. Neither the richest foods, nor golden chalices filled with sapphires or diamonds--will content him without Christ. As the two Marys were not satisfied with the linen clothes lying in the sepulcher unless they had seen the body of Jesus, so it is not the linen on the communion table or the elements of bread and wine which will satisfy a believer--unless he meets with Christ whom his soul loves. He desires still more of Christ and would be swallowed up in the sweet ocean of His love. Behold here a desire which God Himself has raised in the soul, and He will open the breast of mercy and satisfy it.

6. A righteous man's DISCOURSE is more excellent. His tongue is tuned to the language of heaven. What is the discourse of the wicked about? Their wares and shops, like the fish in the gospel, which had a piece

of money in its mouth. "He who is of the earth speaks of the earth," John 3:31. And too often, corrupt communication proceeds from the wicked, their mouth being like a sewer where all the filth of the house runs out. These lepers need to have their lips covered.

Sinners, in their ordinary discourse, bring forth Scripture as the Philistines did Sampson--to make sport; as if the Bible were a foolish jest. It is a saying of Luther, "Whom God has a mind to destroy, He lets them play with Scripture."

But in this sense the righteous is more excellent. "The tongue of the just is as choice silver," Proverbs 10:20. Gracious words drop as silver from him to the enriching of the souls of others. "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious," Ecclesiastes 10:12. In the Hebrew it is, "they are grace." His words are not as vinegar to fret others--but as salt to season others, Colossians 4:6. A godly man's mouth is full of heaven. He speaks as if he had already been in heaven. The holy conference of the two disciples going to Emmaus brought Christ into their company. "While they communed together, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them," Luke 24:15. Such savory speeches drop from the holy lips, that God has a notebook to write them down. "Then those who feared the Lord spoke with each other, and the Lord listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and loved to think about him," Malachi 3:16. It is reported of Tamerlain (the Mongol conqueror) that he kept a register of the names and good deeds of his soldiers. Just so, God registers the speeches of His people, so that they may not be lost.

7. A righteous man is of a more excellent SPIRIT. An excellent spirit was found in Daniel, Daniel 5:12. "My servant Caleb has a different spirit and has followed Me completely," Numbers 14:24. A wicked man has the "spirit of the world," 1 Corinthians 2:12. He is of an atheistic spirit--but a person invested with grace has choiceness of spirit in him. He is of a heavenly, noble, invincible spirit.

He is of a heavenly spirit; he savors the things of God. A person rich in grace, sets his feet where others set their hearts. He, being clothed with Christ the Son of righteousness and crowned with the graces as glittering stars, has the world under him. The world may have his look--but Christ has his love; he dwells below--but trades in the Jerusalem above. A true saint is taken up about higher matters: getting the love and favor of God. He aspires after glory and immortality; he looks no lower than a heavenly crown; he feeds as the birds of paradise--on the dew of heaven; he is employed about angels' work, lifting up God's name in the world; he is a living organ of God's praise.

He is of a noble spirit; he has the spirit of an heir of heaven. He scorns anything that is vile and degraded. He can deny himself--but not debase himself. He can be humble--but not vile. He does not endorse the sins of any--which would be to wash the devil's face. He cannot prostitute himself to the lusts of men, or flatter to get advancement, Job 32:21. A righteous man abhors to swerve from the truth, to gain secular advantage. It was said of Luther that he cared not for gold; his spirit was more noble than to be bribed with money. A godly man will not purchase his liberty, by ensnaring his conscience. "Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection." Hebrews 11:35.

He is of an invincible spirit. He bears afflictions without fainting or fretting, though the archers shoot at him. His bow abides in strength. Such people as lack a principle of grace, faint in the day of adversity; they cannot bear a frown or a reproach. If the bough of a tree is rotten, the least weight hung upon it breaks it. But the righteous has the heart of a lion. He is not startled at the reproaches of the world. He looks upon reproaches for Christ, as badges of honor, 1 Peter 4:11. When the Roman Catholics taunted Luther for his

apostasy from their church, Luther replied, "I confess I am an apostate from you--but a blessed one; I am such an apostate as a sorcerer is, when he renounces his compact made with the devil and betakes himself to Christ." Grace steels the heart with courage--and fires it with zeal.

Athanasius was both a loadstone and an adamant rock; a loadstone for the sweetness of his disposition and an adamant rock for the invincibleness of his resolution. When the emperor Valens promised Basil great preferment if he would subscribe to the Arian heresy, Basil responded, "Sir, these speeches are fit to catch little children--but we who are taught by the Spirit are ready to endure a thousand deaths--rather than suffer one word of Scripture to be altered." A righteous man is willing to take the cross for his estate and, with Ignatius, wear Christ's sufferings as a necklace of pearls. "We glory in tribulation," Romans 5:3. "Paul rattled his chain and gloried in it, as a woman who is proud of her jewels!" said Chrysostom. "It is to my loss," said Gordius the martyr, if you abate me anything of my sufferings." Of what heroic and undaunted spirits, were the primitive Christians who could scorn preferments, laugh at imprisonments, snatch up torments as crowns, and whose love to Christ burned hotter than the fire, insomuch that the heathens cried out, "Great is the God of the Christians!"

8. The PRAYERS of a righteous man are more excellent. Another may have more elegance in prayer--but he has more sincerity. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord--but the prayer of the upright is His delight," Proverbs 15:8. A sinner's praying is howling, "They do not cry to Me from their hearts; rather, they howl on their beds." Hosea 7:14--but the prayer of a righteous man is music in God's ears. "Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet," Song of Solomon 2:14. Maximinius, a persecutor, being on his sick bed, craved the prayers of the godly.

The excellency of a righteous man's prayer is seen by its noble exploits--and by its gracious returns.

(1) By its noble exploits. Luther's prayer recovered Theodorus Vitus from death, after the physicians had given him over for dead. The prayer of the righteous has stopped the sun in its course, Joshua 10:13. It has divided the waters, Exodus 14:15,21; overcome armies, Exodus 17:11; cast out devils, Matthew 17:21; opened prisons, Acts 12:9; shut the windows of heaven, James 5:17. Prayer has had power with God, Hosea 12:4. The Tyrians tied fast their god Hercules with a golden chain. The great Jehovah is held by the prayers of His people. "I will not let You go until You bless me!" said Jacob, Genesis 32:26.

(2) By its gracious return. When the tree of the promise is shaken by the hand of prayer, some fruit falls. "When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue them and honor them." Psalms 91:15. Prayer is the golden fleet which the saints send out to heaven--which comes home richly laden with mercy. Sometimes God gives His people the same mercy in kind that they pray for. "For this child I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition," 1 Samuel 1:27. Sometimes God gives them that which is better than they ask for. They pray for temporal things--and He gives them spiritual blessings! They pray for more health--and He gives them more grace. They desire the venison and, instead of that, He gives them the blessing; so He pays them in a better coin. That which makes the prayer of a righteous man so excellent and availing is:

First, because his affections are drawn forth strongly in prayer; his eyes melt into tears; his heart burns with desire. He is "fervent in spirit," Romans 12:11. It is a metaphor which alludes to water boiling over. A good heart boils over with hot affections in prayer! There may be powder in a gun--when there is no fire. Some may have good matter in prayer--but no fire of affection to discharge it. Prayer without fervency is like wine which has lost the spirits. Without fervency, prayer is not prayer. A righteous man is carried up to

heaven, in a fiery chariot of devotion. This holy fervency is caused by the Spirit of God, who both inspires and inflames the saint's prayers, Romans 8:26. The Spirit helps us with sighs and groans. Not only gifts--but groans; and surely the incense of a righteous man's prayer, with the Holy Spirit's fire put to it--must ascend as a sweet perfume to heaven!

Second, a righteous man's prayers are so excellent because he sprinkles faith in every prayer. "Unto You, O Lord, do I lift up my soul, O my God I trust in You," Psalm 25:1. Faith is the breath of prayer. As the body cannot live without breath, so prayer cannot live unless faith breathes in it. Faith is the bullet which is shot in prayer. A believing prayer can obtain anything from God. It is reported of a nobleman of this nation, that the Queen gave him a ring and told him that, when he was in any difficulty, let him send that ring to her and she would assist him. To this ring I compare prayer. When a child of God stands in need of anything, he sends this ring to God, presents it by the hand of faith--and has his desires granted!

Third, a righteous man's prayers are so excellent because Jesus Christ presents them to His Father. Prayer, as it comes from the godly, is mixed with sin--but Christ takes the dross out of their prayers--and presents nothing but pure gold! He dips the prayers of His people in His blood, and mingles them with His sweet incense--and so they are most fragrant and aromatic to God. A weak prayer being laid upon Christ as the altar--the altar sanctifies it. Christ's praying over a saint's prayer, makes it prevalent in respect of his office (as He is a priest), His relation (as He is a Son), and His merit (as He is God). "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them!" Hebrews 7:25. "But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." Luke 22:32. "The Spirit Himself intercedes for us." Romans 8:26

9. The TEARS of a righteous man are more excellent. Holy tears are the precious ointment which distills from the trees of righteousness. Mary Magdalene stood at Christ's feet weeping. Her tears dropped as diamonds from her eyes! The tears of the wicked are good for nothing. They are either carnal (they weep for worldly losses) or spurious (they are more troubled for hell, than sin). Their conscience is in agony. There is water in their eyes--because there is fire in their bones. But the tears of a true penitent are more precious. They drop from the eyes of faith and hope. They are purifying tears. The holy mourner weeps out sin. These tears are the wine of angels. They are so precious--that God bottles them! "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book!" Psalm 56:8. In the Hebrew it is "my tear," to show that God takes notice of every tear. Though holy tears are silent--yet they have a voice. "The Lord has heard the voice of my weeping!" Psalm 6:8 Though our tears fall to the earth--yet they reach heaven! Tears dropping from the saints' eyes are as sweet water dropping from the roses.

10. The LIFE of a righteous man is more excellent for spiritualness and for usefulness.

First, the life of a righteous man is more excellent for spiritualness, and that three ways:

(1) The life of a righteous man is more excellent for spiritualness--as he lives by a more spiritual RULE than others. A sinner either lives by no rule--or by a false rule. He walks according to the course of the world. "You used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God." Ephesians 2:2. But a righteous man goes by the rule of Scripture, as a well-made dial goes exactly by the sun. God's Word is the oracle he consults with; it is his pillar of fire, or pole-star to direct him. "Your word is a lamp unto my feet," Psalm 119:105. The Word is a divine treatise; it is a revelation of God's mind, to which a pious man

conforms both his moral and sacred actions. He will not form his beliefs from church councils or church fathers; nor will he follow the examples of the best men further than they follow the Word.

(2) A The life of a righteous man is more excellent for spiritualness--as he he lives a life ABOVE others, whereas they live no higher than human reason. The godly man lives by faith. A righteous man moves in a higher sphere. He penetrates the clouds. Moses saw Him who is invisible. Sense and reason are too low in stature to see Christ. Faith does not climb up into the tree as Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-4)--but within the veil, and there sees Jesus. A holy person sends out faith as a spy--to view the land of promise. Faith unties difficulties. "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed," Romans 4:18. Against all hope of human reason, Abraham believed in hope of the promise. Faith anticipates future things, and makes them present. When God told Abraham what a glorious country He would give him, Abraham looked upon it as if it had been actually done and he had taken possession of it.

Faith can live upon God, in the deficiency of visible comforts. "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior!" Habakkuk 3:17-18. A righteous man believes that if God will save him from hell--He will save him from need; if He will give him a kingdom--He will not deny him daily bread.

(3) The life of a righteous man is more excellent for spiritualness--as he shows forth more of the powers of HOLINESS in his life than others. He is a pattern of piety. Aaron, the saint of the Lord, was adorned more by his sanctity--more than his fine linen garments. A moralist may live as a man--but he who is regenerate lives the life of Christ. The Macedonians, on the birthday of Alexander the Great, wore Alexander's picture about their necks set with gold and pearl. So the righteous carry the living picture of Christ in their holy example. They live so devoutly as if they had seen the Lord with bodily eyes!

Second, the life of a righteous man is more excellent for usefulness. He is a blessing in the midst of the land. He spends and is spent for Christ; yet he would rather wear out--than rust out. The lives of the wicked are unprofitable, therefore they are compared to chaff. The lives of the wicked are hurtful, therefore they are compared to thorns. But a righteous man is like the bee or silk-worm, working for the good of others. "It comforts me," said worthy John Jewel, "that I have exhausted myself in the labors of my holy calling." A godly man hangs between these two as a needle between two loadstones: longing to be with Christ in heaven--and loving to serve Him on earth.

(1) A righteous man is helpful to the BODIES of others. He is a temporal savior. He has one eye shut--to wink at the failings of others; and another eye open--to observe their needs. He is like the heavens, diffusing his influence and sending down his silver drops of charity; he is a staff to the lame, and bread to the hungry. He is a golden crutch to support others, when they are falling. As Mary brought her sweet ointments to anoint Christ's body, so a gracious soul brings his ointments of charity to anoint the saints, who are Christ's living body.

A godly man judiciously considers how he himself lives upon charity--the earth enriches him with veins of silver and crops of grain. One creature brings him wool, another oil, another silk. Observing every creature conspiring for his good, he studies to lay out himself for the good of others. Faith, if it has no works, is dead, James 2:17. Faith sanctifies works--and works testify of faith. A believer, with one hand, receives Christ's merits; with the other hand he relieves his fellow members. And he not only gives to the necessities of the poor--but gives freely. Charity drops from him as myrrh from the tree. He does not put

his alms among his catalog of debts; he is thankful that God has made him in the number of givers--and not receivers.

(2) A righteous man is helpful to the SOULS of others. He who pities his neighbor's ox when it is fallen into a pit--much more pities his neighbor's soul that is falling into hell. He counsels the ignorant, confirms the weak, gathers the wandering, and converts the sinner from the error of his way.

(3) A righteous man is helpful to his COUNTRY. He stands as a screen between it and the fire of God's wrath. "So He said He would have destroyed them--if Moses His chosen one had not stood before Him in the breach, to turn His wrath away from destroying them." Psalm 106:23. When a breach is made in the wall of a castle, soldiers stand in that breach until the enemy is beaten back. So when the wrath of God was coming against Israel, Moses stood in the breach and, by his prayers, kept it off. The saints are the Atlases--who bear up a nation from sinking. The poets thought that as long as Hector lived, Troy could not be demolished. "I bear up the pillars," Psalm 75:3. Ambrose was called the wall of Italy. Lot, while in Sodom, kept off the fire. "Hasten! escape to Zoar, for I cannot do anything until you get there," Genesis 19:22. A wicked nation is often reprieved--for the sake of the godly. The tares are spared--for the wheat's sake.

11. The DEATH of a righteous man is more excellent. Death comes with a blessing. "What man is he who lives and shall not see death?" Psalm 89:48. Grace itself gives no charter of exemption from it. An earthen pot, though full of gold, may break. The righteous, who are earthen vessels, though they are filled with the golden graces, are not freed from breaking by death. But their death is precious.

Wicked men, when they die, there is no missing them. Their life was scarcely worth a prayer, nor their death worth a tear. The wicked die in their sins, John 8:24. Death to them is but a trap door, to let them into hell. But when a righteous man dies, his sins die with him. The pale face of death looks ruddy, being sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb. When a believer has death in his body, he has Christ in his soul. The day of his death is his ascension day to heaven. The death of a saint is precious to God; the righteous are said to be gathered. A sinner is carried away in a storm, whereas the righteous are gathered, like we gather precious fruit and preserve it.

So greatly does God value the death of a saint that He makes inquisition for every drop of his blood. His death is precious to the saints who survive him. They follow his hearse weeping, as David did Abner's. Though they know that, when a godly man dies, he is fixed in a higher and more transparent orb, yet they cannot but mourn at the fall of such a star. It is a lamentation when God cuts down the pillars of a land; the great cables and anchors of a ship being gone, there is danger of a shipwreck. It presages a storm coming when God hides His jewels. After Austin's death followed the sacking of Hippo by the Goths and Vandals. After the decease of Paraeus came the destruction of Heidelberg. Hence it is that the saints who are left behind, when they see such as are the glory of a kingdom taken away by a stroke of death, cannot but cry as Elisha did when Elijah was parted from him. "My Father, my Father, the chariot of Israel and tile horsemen thereof", 2 Kings 2:12. The saints living are affected with the loss of the godly, and carry them to their grave with a shower of tears.

12. The DUST of a righteous man is more excellent. When the bodies of the wicked are laid in the grave, there lies a heap of dust to be tumbled into hell. But the dust of a righteous man is part of Christ's mystical Body. The dust of a saint is united to Christ while it is in the grave, and as the dust of believers is now excellent, so it will appear shortly in the sight of men and angels. Emperor Trajan's ashes were honored at

Rome, so the ashes of the saints at the resurrection shall be honored when they shall be made like Christ's glorious body in its beauty, strength, agility, and immortality.

2. A righteous man is more excellent than a wicked man--in respect of what he HAS.

1. He has a more excellent NAME. God Himself embalmed Moses' name and set a garland of honor upon him. Joshua 1:2, "Moses My servant is dead." The names of the righteous are registered in the sacred records of Scripture. Proverbs 10:7, "The memory of the just is blessed." Isaiah 65:15 "The wicked leave their name for a curse." How cursed is the name of Judas! What Christian would give his child that name? How odious are the names of Nero, Domitian, and Bonner! When their bodies rot underground, their names rot above ground. But by faith, the righteous obtained a good report. How renowned was Moses for his meekness, and Cornelius for his alms? Their names send forth a fragrant perfume in the church of God to this day. "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance," Psalm 112:6. It may be said of a gracious person as once was said of King David, his name was much esteemed. A wicked man may leave a great estate behind; a righteous man leaves a good name.

2. A righteous man has more excellent COMPANY. He has the fellowship of the saints. "I am companion to all those who fear You," Psalm 119:6. A godly man delights in a companion of his own species. The lamb does not care to be with the wolf. If unawares a godly man comes into the company of the wicked, he fears either pollution or scandal. Therefore, he makes haste to get out--as out of an infected house. A righteous man flourishes among the saints. He is joined to Christ's mystical body. "After they were released, they went to their own fellowship," Acts 4:23.

A righteous man has fellowship with God. "Our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus," 1 John 1:3. A gracious soul has sweet communion with heaven; he goes to God by prayer and God comes to him by His Spirit. How happy is that person who has the angels to guard him--and God to keep him company!

3. A righteous man has more excellent PROMISES belonging to him. What a sinner has is rather by providence, than by virtue of a promise. It is the saints who are called "heirs of the promise;" Hebrews 6:17, and those promises are precious, 2 Peter 1:4. They are the beams of the sun of righteousness, the pleasant streams which run in the paradise of Scripture. "All things work together for good," Romans 8:28--but to whom? "To those who love God." All mercies shall work for their good. They shall be footstools to lift up their hearts higher to heaven. And all afflictions shall work for their good; the chastening rod shall be a divine pencil to draw Christ's image more lively upon their souls!

There is another promise. "I will never leave you nor forsake you," Hebrews 13:5. This promise belongs to the heirs of salvation. God will not leave His people either to their strong corruptions or their weak graces. He will counsel them in their doubts, supply them in their needs, and defend them in their dangers. When they are most assaulted, they shall be most assisted. How can God leave them? They are His spouse. Will a man leave his spouse?

Thus the saints have the royal charter of the promises settled upon them. As these promises are sweet, so they are sure. Men reckon their wealth not always by what ready money they have in their houses--but by their bonds and deeds. A Christian's estate lies mostly in bonds and deeds of God's hand, sealed with His oath. What better security can there be?

4. A righteous man has more excellent FREEDOM. "And I will walk at liberty," Psalm 119:45. Another is capable of civil freedom; he may be a Roman born--but he is still enslaved to his lusts. But a righteous

person is God's freeman, 1 Corinthians 7:22. His neck is out of the devil's yoke. He is "free from the law of sin," Romans 8:2. He has God's free Spirit, Psalm 51:12, which makes him free and cheerful in his obedience. The will is not compelled, but changed. A regenerate person is drawn indeed by the Spirit, but sweetly--as one is drawn into a garden of spices by the fragrance of their smell. He is drawn to Christ as one is drawn with another's beauty. He is free; a righteous soul chooses the ways of God, Psalm 119:30, and what greater act of freedom is there, than an act of choice? A saint cannot have his spiritual freedom taken away from him. While he suffers in prison, his conscience is most free.

5. A righteous man has more excellent FOOD. Carnal men feed only on earthly provision; the righteous feeds on heavenly. He tastes how sweet the Lord is, Psalm 34:8. He feeds on God's love; this is the hidden manna. He eats Christ's flesh, which not only begets life, John 6:33--but prevents death. "This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die," John 6:50--that is, not die the second death. Other bread may nauseate or cause bloating--but there is no excess here. We cannot eat too much of the Bread of Life. We cannot have too much of Christ, as one cannot have too much of health. Oh, what excellent food is this! God Himself is in this cheer!

6. A righteous man has more excellent ARMOR, namely, "the armor of light," Romans 13:12. This armor is of God's making, and the Lord, with His armor, gives strength. Alexander the Great might have given armor to a coward--but he could not give him courage. But God infuses a spirit of magnanimity into His people. With His armor He conveys strength. "My strength is made perfect in weakness," 2 Corinthians 12:9. When a Christian has on God's armor, and goes forth in the power of His might, nothing can hurt him. The wicked one touches him not, that is, with a deadly touch. Grace is bullet-proof armor; it may be shot--but it cannot be shot through.

This spiritual armor is not burdensome; a Christian may run his race in it--as well as fight. The more the armor of God is struck at--the stronger it is; the more faith is assaulted--the more vigorous it is; the more zeal is opposed--the hotter it is. This excellent armor makes a Christian steadfast in religion. Hypocrites wear Christ's colors--but lack His armor; therefore, they fall away. The righteous man never gives over the spiritual combat, until the trophies are hung up and the palm branches are put in his hand in token of victory!

7. A righteous man has more excellent HOPES. A sinner's hope is in this life; he hopes to increase his estate. He makes the wedge of gold his hope--but it is a perishing hope, "When the wicked die, their hopes all perish!" Proverbs 11:7.

But the righteous man's hope excels. His hope is in Christ; this is both a helmet and an anchor. While he is fighting with temptation--hope is a helmet. While he is upon the waters of affliction--hope is an anchor. The anchor of a ship is cast downwards; but the anchor of the soul is cast upwards in heaven. A saint's hope is a purifying hope, a death-bed hope, a soul-comforting hope. He is "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior," Titus 2:13. When Christ was in the flesh, He appeared as a Surety; now in heaven He appears as an Advocate and, when He comes in the clouds, He will appear as a Judge. A righteous man hopes for this blessed appearing, when Christ shall vindicate His saints from all unjust calumnies and openly acquit them in the court.

8. A righteous man has more excellent JOYS. True religion does not restrain his joy--but refines his joy. What is the joy of a sinner? He takes joy in food and wine; he sucks from the flower of pleasure. Alas! What is this, compared to the joy of the righteous? We joy in God. This joy arises from the pardon of sin,

the first fruits of the Spirit, and the foretaste of glory. The gleanings of this heavenly joy, are better than the vintage of carnal joy. Plato told the musicians that philosophers could dine and sup without them. How much more can a believer be merry in the Lord without the supplement of worldly comforts!

The joy of the righteous is a more inward joy. "You have put gladness in my heart," Psalm 4:7. Other joy lies more in the surface; it pleases the senses. It is like the paradise the Turks dream of, where they shall have all dainty dishes served with gold in abundance, silken and purple apparel, and angels their servants bringing them red wine in silver cups. This delights the the senses--but divine joy cheers the conscience. The saints' joy, being inward, sweetens affliction. It turns their water into wine. "Having received the Word in much affliction, with joy" I Thessalonians 1:6.

The joy of the righteous is a more unmixed joy. Worldly joy is usually spiced with some bitterness; guilt eclipses it. "In laughter the heart is sorrowful," Proverbs 14:13. One may drink wormwood in a golden cup; but the joy of the righteous, like David's harp, drives away sadness. It gives honey without gall; it has no alloy or bitterness.

The joy of the righteous is a more durable joy. Other joy is like a flower which withers while you are smelling it. I have read of a river which runs in the day with a full torrent, but is dry at night. The comforts of the world run strongly in the day of health and prosperity--but at the night of death they are dried up. But as joy abounds in the godly, so it abides. "Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will rob you of your joy," John 16:22. Divine joy is but begun in this life; it is perfected in glory! Here is but the tuning of the instrument; the sweet concert is reserved for heaven. Here the saints do but sip of the cup of joy--there they shall drink of the rivers of pleasure forevermore!

3. A righteous man is more excellent than a wicked man--in respect of what he SHALL have.

He shall have a better reward. Both righteous and wicked are rewarded--but there is a vast difference. The wicked shall have a reward of punishment, the righteous shall have a reward of mercy. So that a man shall say, "truly there is a reward for the righteous," Psalm 58:11. They shall be rewarded with a kingdom. The height of men's ambition, is a kingdom. Earthly kingdoms are corruptible. What has become of the pride of Babylon, the glory of Athens, the pomp of Troy? They lie buried in their own ruins! But the kingdom of heaven cannot be shaken, Hebrews 12:28; it runs parallel with eternity. In that blessed kingdom, we shall have a transforming sight of God. We shall be like Him, 1 John 3:2--as a pearl, by the beams of the sun, becomes bright and radiant like the sun. God's terror shall be then laid aside. The majesty in God shall appear--but majesty shining with beauty and sweetened with love. This will be unspeakable, and full of glory.

And this reward is near at hand. "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed," Romans 13:11. When Columbus's men were weary of their voyage, he begged them to go on but three days longer. They did so and discovered America. While the righteous fall upon the waters of affliction, this may comfort them in their voyage; by going a little further they will see heaven! There the tree of life grows and the crystal streams flow from Lebanon! The saints' salvation is now nearer, than on the birthday of their faith. Thus I have beaten out this gold in the text into the leaf, and shown you wherein "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor," Proverbs 12:26.

II. The second thing is WHY a righteous man is more excellent than another. The reason is in respect of that near relation he stands in to Christ. There is blood kinship; He is brother to Christ. Christ partakes of his flesh--and he partakes of Christ's Spirit. There is unity--a righteous man is one with Christ as the

members are one with the head. Then, surely, the righteous must have a surpassing dignity. If Christ is a precious corner-stone, 1 Peter 2:6, then also those living stones must be precious, which are built upon Him.

USE 1. See from hence, what it is which raises the value of a person. It is righteousness; this puts a glory and excellency upon him. He who is graceless is worthless. "The heart of the wicked is of little value," Proverbs 10:20. But righteousness makes the heart like the heaven bespangled with stars. The Christian's graces are compared to chains of gold for their value, and to myrrh and cassia for their fragrance. As the precious stones shone upon Aaron's breastplate, so righteousness shines in the eyes of God and angels. What made Christ admire the woman of Canaan--but her graces? "Great is your faith," Matthew 15:28. Christ was more pleased with her faith--than all the fancy buildings of the Temple. God does not esteem the better of any man because he is rich or noble or embellished with worldly ornaments. It is righteousness which advances him. Righteousness is to the soul--as the diamond is to the ring--as light is to the world which bespangles and adorns it.

USE 2. Learn then, that it is no disparagement to any person to be righteous, seeing it casts a splendor and renown on him and makes him more excellent than others. Some are loathe to espouse religion because they think it will be a stain to their reputation; but you see how righteousness emblazons one's name--and gives him a super-eminence above others. Novarinus relates of an ancient king who invited a company of poor Christians and set them above some of his nobles. Being asked why he showed so much respect to men of such low birth and extract, he replied, "I must honor these as the children of the most high God; they will be kings and princes with me in another world." Theodosius thought it a greater renown to be a member of Christ--than the head of an empire.

The righteous are highly in favor with God, and He has enrolled their names in the Book of Life. It was a custom among the Romans to write down the names of their senators in a book. This is the honor of the righteous--their names are written among the courtiers of heaven. Believers, in regard of their mystical union with Christ, have a kind of excellence above the angels. The angels are morning stars, Job 38:7--but these are clothed with the sun. Can it be any shame to be listed among the saints, when God is not ashamed to be called their God? Hebrews 11:16.

USE 3. See what high thoughts God has of the righteous--He looks upon them as more excellent than others, and His judgment is best worth praising. The saints have low thoughts of themselves; they overlook their own worth, like Moses who did not know that his face shined. The eye, though beautiful, does not see itself. Yet, as low thoughts as the righteous have of themselves, God has high thoughts of them. "You are precious in My sight and honored, and I love you," Isaiah 43:4. The Lord throws away the wicked like dross. The greatest man in the world, lacking holiness, is like Naaman, who was captain of the king's host and a mighty man of valor--but he was a leper, 2 Kings 5:1. A wicked man may be higher than others in nobility and worldly grandeur. A dunghill is higher than other ground--but it is never the better; it sends forth odious vapors.

God's TITLES for the righteous

But God sets a high estimate upon the righteous, and that appears by bestowing more excellent titles on them than upon others.

1. God calls them "My jewels" in Malachi 3:17. He laid His best jewel to pawn for them. They are jewels for their sparkling quality. They shine in God's eye. The saints have a kind of angelic brightness, as one of the

ancients expresses it.

They are jewels for their value. Diamonds, said Pliny, were only known among kings and emperors. The value of a saint is above others, "Better is the poor that walks in his uprightness, than he who perverts his ways, though he be rich", Proverbs 28:6.

2. God calls the righteous "hidden ones" in Psalm 83:3. They are hidden, first, for their invisibility. Their excellence is not known to many. The world can see their infirmity, not their eminence. A saint has that eternal glory which cannot be beheld by a carnal eye; the lovely face is hidden, when under a veil. Second, righteous are hidden for their safety. Diamonds are hidden in the rock, so the saint's life is hid in Christ, the Rock of Ages, Colossians 9:5.

3. God calls the righteous "the excellent of the earth" in Psalm 16:2, or "the magnificent," as Junius renders it. They are the spiritual glorious ones; they are the cream and flower of the creation; they are the purer part of the world, doubly refined, Zechariah 13:9.

4. God calls them "vessels of honor" in 2 Timothy 2:21. Though they are earthen vessels, yet they have heavenly treasure in them. They are filled with the wine of the Spirit, Ephesians 5:18. Though they are scourged with affliction, yet it is to make them brighter, "Many will be purified, cleansed, and refined by these trials." Daniel 12:10. "I have refined you in the furnace of suffering." Isaiah 48:10. "He will sit as a Refiner and Purifier of silver; He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness." Malachi 3:3

5. God calls them "the apple of His eye". "Whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye!" Zechariah 2:8. The pupil of the eye is the tenderest part of the eye, to express God's tenderness of them. God cannot endure to have His eyeball touched.

6. God calls them "His portion" in Deuteronomy 32:9. As if riches lay in them. As a man seals a bag of money for his use, so the Lord seals His people as His portion with a double seal, one of election, 2 Timothy 2:19, the other of assurance, Ephesians 1:13.

7. God calls them His "plant of renown" in Ezekiel 34:29. He hedges in this noble plant with His protection, waters it with the silver drops of His ordinances, blesses the growth of it, adorns it with fruit, and transplants it into the heavenly paradise, where it grows continually in the sweet sunshine of His favor.

8. God calls them "joint heirs with Christ" in Romans 8:17. Jesus Christ is a rich heir. He is Lord of all--and the saints have joint heirs with Christ!

9. God calls them the luminaries of the world. They give light by their precepts and example. "Among whom you shine as lights in the world," Philippians 2:15, Lot was a bright star in Sodom. The world would be dark--were it not for the children of light.

10. God calls them a "peculiar people" in 1 Peter 2:9. He has taken them out of the world--as out of the wild forest, and enclosed them to Himself by a decree. They are a purchased people. The righteous are the purchase of Christ's blood--He will never lose His purchase.

11. God calls them a kingdom of priests. They are kings. They have their throne, Revelation 3:21, and white robes, Revelation 6:11, Robes signify their dignity, and white their sanctity.

They are priests. The priesthood under the law was honorable. The king's daughter was wife to Jehoiada the priest, 2 Chronicles 22:11. In ancient times, the Egyptians chose their kings out of their priests. The saints are consecrated to be priests--to offer up to God the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in heaven.

God calls them a crown of glory and a diadem in His hand, Isaiah 62:3 That is, said a learned writer, they are exceedingly eminent and renowned above other people. The crown is a sign of the highest state and honor. Nay, the Lord calls them expressly His glory. "Israel My glory" Isaiah 46:13, as if His glory lay in His people.

All this shows what a high estimate God puts upon the righteous, in giving them such illustrious titles of honor. They are princes in all lands. The Lord will give whole kingdoms to ransom them, "I gave Egypt for your ransom," Isaiah 43:3. That was when God destroyed Egypt in the Red Sea for the saving of Israel. Nay, God gave His own Son to die for their ransom!

And if God esteems so highly His people now on earth, how much more will He value them when they are in heaven! If when the righteous are afflicted, they are so excellent--then how much more when they are crowned! If with their blemishes they are precious--then how much more when their imperfections shall be forever done away with, and they shall be presented to the Father without spot and blemish! If gold is valuable in the ore--then how precious is it when it is fully refined? If wheat is excellent when it is mingled with chaff--then how much worth has it, when it is winnowed and made pure? If God reposes the righteous more excellent than others when conflicting with infirmities--then how incomparably excellent and glorious will they appear in His eye, when they shall be cleansed from all remaining corruption, and shall shine with perfect purity! If a man prizes his friend when he is filled with leprosy--how much more will he prize him when he sees him in perfect health? If God esteems the righteous better than others in the present juncture of time--when they have their exasperating passions and fainting-fits of unbelief--what will He do when they shall be perfectly holy and righteous!

USE 4. See the different esteem which God has of the righteous--and that which the ungodly have of them. The ungodly esteem the saints lightly; they disdain them and scarcely allow them any notice. They think, of all things, that it would be best if the people of God were swept from the earth; they look upon them as the burden and refuse of the earth. "We are treated like the world's garbage, like everybody's trash!" 1 Corinthians 4:13. The apostles were treated by some like the dung cart which goes through the city--into which everyone throws his filth. The saints are loaded with invectives and are not judged worthy to live in the world. "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live!" Acts 22:22.

But God has an entirely different way of evaluating the righteous. He thinks the world is not worthy of them. "Of whom the world was not worthy, Hebrews 11:38. Hence it is, that He takes his children so fast away by death and places them among the angels! God looks upon the righteous as His skillful needle-work, wrought with the finger of the Holy Spirit, and the glory of the creation. He would soon break up house in the world--were it not for their sakes. This excellent esteem God has of them, will be best seen when Christ shall separate between the precious and the vile, and shall say to the wicked, "Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons!" Then He will say to the godly, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"

USE 5. See how dearly God loves the righteous--and how near to His heart they lie! They are more excellent. The word "excellent" carries affection in it. Things we prize we love. The righteous are "His

treasured possession" Psalm 135:4. And where His treasure is--there is His heart. They are God's delicious garden where He plants the flower of His love! They are dearly beloved by Him. They are His darling! He engraves them upon the palms of His hands--that they may be never out of His eye. He rejoices over them with joy, and rests in His love.

"The Father himself loves you dearly." John 16:27 It is no common affection, which God bears to the righteous. The sun shining through the magnifying glass--only sets on fire the object that is near the glass. The beams of God's love are more intensely inflamed towards those who are near Him by grace; these have the epitome of His love--He loves them as He loves Christ! "You have loved them as You have loved Me." John 17:23. Indeed, in one sense, God's love to Christ and believers is not alike, for Christ is loved purely for His own sake--but believers are loved for Christ's sake. Yet, in another sense, God the Father loves believers--just as He loves Christ. It is the same love for the quality, the same for the unchangeableness of it. God will no more cease to love believers--than He will to love Christ!

USE 6. See from hence what a venerable opinion we should have of the righteous. They are to be prized by us above others. "He honors those who fear the Lord," Psalm 15:4. A saint in rags--is better than a sinner in scarlet! We prize things that have excellency in them. Why do we value gold and diamonds--but because they excel glass beads? Oh, then, esteem the righteous as most worthy because of intrinsic holiness whereby they outshine their neighbors!

The righteous carry Christ about them. "Christ lives in me," Galatians 2:20. Queen Cleopatra carried a jewel in her purse, which contained the price of a kingdom. How rich are they who carry Christ, the Pearl of price, with them! Do not despise the saints for their worldly poverty--but honor them for their spiritual virtue. We esteem a diamond--though it is in the dust. John Baptist wore but a leather belt, yet he was more than a prophet. He was honored to usher in the King of Glory into the world. John was so eminent a person, that Herod swore to the damsel to give her what she asked--up to half of the kingdom. But John Baptist was worth more than all his kingdom. A saint's exterior may be poor--but he has a rich lining. The outside of the Tabernacle was goat's hair--but within it was embellished with gold. "The king's daughter is all glorious within," Psalm 45:13. Jesus Christ Himself was outwardly poor--yet in Him are "unsearchable riches!" Ephesians 3:8. A soul inspired by the Almighty and beautified with grace--exceeds others more than the light of the sun exceeds the light of a candle.

USE 7. If the righteous are more excellent than others, then how severe will God be against those who wrong or harm them! The wicked are thorns in the sides of the godly. Paul was scourged by cruel hands. "Thrice was I beaten with rods," 2 Corinthians 11:25. This was as if you should see a slave whip the king's son! But shall not God avenge His elect? Surely He will. "The sword of the Lord is drenched with blood. For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance," Isaiah 34:6, 8. It is as if the prophet had said, "The time appointed has now come for God to avenge Zion for the wrongs done to her."

Jeremiah 50:10-11 says, "Babylonia will be plundered until the attackers are glutted with plunder, says the Lord, because you rejoice and are glad, you who pillage my inheritance." And Jeremiah 30:16, "But in that coming day, all who destroy you will be destroyed." The saints are people of honor; they are God's first-born. Oh, how enraged will the Lord be against such as harm them! They trample God's pearls in the dust! They strike at the apple of His eye! The righteous are God's diadem. Will a king endure to have His robes spit upon--and his crown thrown in the dirt? What is done to the righteous is done to God Himself. When the king's favorite is struck--the king himself is struck at. "I know your rage against Me," 2 Kings 19:27. The rage of Sennacherib was against Hezekiah, but, there being a league between God and His

people, the Lord took it as done to Himself. "I know Your rage against Me!" Certainly it shall not go unpunished.

The MARKS of a righteous man

Let us try whether we are in the number of these righteous ones; whether we are indeed more excellent than others.

1. A righteous man is a HUMBLE man. He who is proud of his righteousness, is unrighteous. "God I thank You that I am not as other men are. . . . I fast. . . . I give tithes. . ." Luke 18:11-12. Here was a triple crown of pride, which the Pharisee wore. Righteousness, though it raises the name, humbles the heart. "If I am righteous, I will not lift up my head," Job 10:15. The violet is a sweet flower--yet hangs down the head; such a flower was Job. The righteous are like the silkworm. While she weaves her skillful works, she hides herself in the silk. The righteous man is more likely to judge himself--than to play the critic on another. He shrinks into nothing in his own thoughts. David cried out, "I am a worm and no man"; though a saint, though a king--yet a worm.

Augustine said, "Lord, I am not worthy of Your love." Hooper said, "Lord I am hell--but You are heaven." Bradford the martyr, subscribed his letter, "The most hard-hearted sinner, John Bradford." He who is righteous puts a greater value upon others than upon himself. "Let each esteem others better than themselves," Philippians 2:3. The higher grace is--the lower the heart is! The more gold you put into the scale, the lower it descends. The richer the ship is laden, the lower it sails! When the soul looks black in its own eye--it is most lovely. "I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit." Isaiah 57:15. God has two heavens--and the humble heart is one of them!

2. A righteous man is devoted to HOLINESS. The priests under the law were not only washed in the great laver--but also adorned with glorious apparel, Exodus 28:2, the emblem of a righteous man who is not only washed from gross sin--but adorned with inward sanctity. The godly man is what he appears to be. He does not have holiness painted on him--but living in him. It is said of Zachariah and Elizabeth that "Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commandments and requirements of the Lord," Luke 1:6. A godly Christian is God's temple. His body is the outward court of the temple--and his soul the holy of holies. He is pure in heart, Matthew 5:8. His work is to serve God--and his end is to enjoy Him. Man, having a principle of reason--must not live as a beast; and, having a principle of righteousness--he must not live as a sinner. "For the grace of God has appeared, with salvation for all people, instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age." Titus 2:11-12. Christ is not only his Priest--but his Pattern. As he makes use of Christ's death for his salvation, so of Christ's life for his imitation.

3. A righteous man is JUST in his dealings. "Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not set his mind on what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully." Psalm 24:3-4. He who is righteous has not only his heart purged from unholiness--but his hands from injustice. He abhors all false ways; he will not defraud to grow rich. He will not sell his conscience for a wedge of gold. A godly Christian is zealous for duties of both tables; he makes piety and justice kiss each other.

4. A Righteous man serves God out of a principle of LOVE. Grace now biases the heart and carries it strongly towards God in ardent affection. A righteous man's serving God is not by constraint--but consent. It is heaven to him to serve God! He mounts up in the fiery chariot of love--and breathes forth his soul into

his Savior's bosom. Love is the shibboleth which differentiates a righteous man from others. The carnal man says, "What a weariness is it to serve the Lord!" Malachi 1:13. The righteous man says, "What a pleasure is it!" "I delight in the law of God in the inner man," Romans 7:22. As the bee delights to suck the flower--so a holy person delights to obey God. He does duty out of love to duty; he prays out of love to prayer. When he sings, he makes melody in his heart to the Lord. Love lines the yoke of religion and makes it easy. As a bride delights in putting on her jewels, as a musician delights in playing on his violin--so a gracious soul delights in obeying God. Love to duty is better than duty; serving God with delight is angelic. The seraphim are described as having wings, Isaiah 6:2, to show their cheerfulness as well as their ability in God's service.

5. A righteous man PERSEVERES in piety. He who quits his work before he has finished it--is but half a workman; and he who quits his religion before he has finished his faith--is but half a Christian. The promise is to him who overcomes. Who makes reckoning of grain which withers before harvest? It was the glory of the church of Thyatira that her last works were more than her first. Perseverance carries away the garland. A true Christian not only sets out in the race, but holds out. "The righteous also shall hold on his way," Job 17:9, be that way what it will. Though strewn with thorns, though there is a lion in the way--he is resolved to hold on his way. "Bonds and afflictions await me--but none of these things move me," Acts 20:23-24. The troubles a godly man meets with for conscience sake, inflame his zeal all the more. Sufferings cannot make Christ stop loving the saints--nor make the saints stop loving Christ. Though Job lost all, he held fast his integrity.

Unsound hearts, when they see persecution coming, leave Christ and shif

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