



MY son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: 2 For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. 3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: 4 So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. 5 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (Prov 3:1-6)

In order to grasp the deeper meaning of God's favor, we must recognize and respond to His Sovereignty in our lives. When the Lord says that He will *direct thy paths* He does not stipulate in the way of wealth but rather in the way of righteousness. This actually should be our only concern – not how much we should ask God to please our wants and desires, but rather how much we may please Him in righteousness and faith. The erroneous understanding of God's favor has been spread more certainly by false teaching from the pulpit of churches than from the dens of iniquity of the world. If we make wealth and comfort our lamb's skin to try God's favor, we have lost that favor already.

If we trust God to be our Sovereign to lead us into all righteousness, and into the best pastures of feeding for our souls, we will not connect that trust to any preconditions. The creature cannot make demands on its Creator. *16 Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?* (Isaiah 29:16) The worry of the righteous has ever been of misinterpreting the difference between the vain sparkle of worldly riches and fortune as opposed to the simple life of the Godly man or woman. Some there be that God deprives of wealth for a purpose unknown to us. Others He bestows material blessing upon as a testimony of their Christian charity (because they give our of a generous heart). But the possession of wealth is not in the least an indicator of godliness and is often a sign of a lack thereof. Whatever the man sets his heart upon to gain, he usually gets. If his heart's treasure is worldly possessions, he may stay up in the wee hours of the night on contriving a plan to gain such worldly riches. That effort may be rewarded by such riches which will perish away with the sands of time and rust of precious metals. In the end, he dies alone and is buried along with the Rich man before whose gate the Beggar, Lazarus, was laid. The difference? Lazarus sought the favor of God despite his lack of worldly favor, and He was rewarded mightily. Our only prayer for material blessing remains simple – our Daily Bread.

Jeremiah lamented the lament of the righteous when he proclaimed: *1 Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? 2 Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.* (Jer 12:1-2) Notice how the unrighteous prosper in the eyes of Jeremiah. Their works bear amazing fruit, though planted with soiled hands. Their wicked ways are not restrained by righteous law since the unrighteous observe no law. They are cunning and defraud every man with whom they have dealings. But look at something else Jeremiah says about these wicked of the world: *thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.* What did Jeremiah mean by this last phrase? Much of the wicked claim God's favor in their greed for money and wealth. God is *near in their mouths* but *far from their reins*. These are the hypocrites of the modern health and wealth gospel. They claim God as their motive in seeking wealth and power, but God is NOT their Sovereign – in other words, God is *far from their reins*. It would be better for such people to be completely ignorant of God than to hold Him in false faith and knowledge. Even the devils do better by believing and trembling. *Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.* (James 2:19)

What privilege does God's favor afford? Is it worldly wealth? Is it comfort and long life? Is it a beautiful home and opulence of furnishings? I could use two of my favorite sisters – both named Betty – who would disprove that theory. One was a poor servant of the Lord who volunteered her time and efforts for our church when there was not money to pay her for her services. This she did for years! The other Betty gave out of her need to keep the church afloat during austere times, working as well without pay or pension. It was their faith that burned in their humanity to serve God that kept them going. One thing of which I am certain: BOTH enjoyed the great favor of God.

If we take our ultimate example of favor, we would be forced to look at our Lord Jesus Christ and the continual favor which He enjoyed of His Father. He never owned a thing but the rags on His back. He had neither house, nor pillow upon which to lay his weary head. He was rejected and scorned by the powerful and wealthy class of Jewish rulers. Yet, He only did wonders of kindness and righteousness for the people. Were we strangers to God, standing by the wayside, we would conclude that this man was foolish and completely unblest. But would we not be in greater error than any in drawing such a conclusion. Our Lord was the Son of God and highly favored – all of His earthly life – by the Father. His favor was infinite.

Maybe you feel your righteousness before God earns you something 'extra'. Really, now? You have no righteousness to claim any advantage whatsoever. Whatever of righteousness you have belongs to another. You only have that righteousness imputed by the Lord Jesus Christ to you. You did not even EARN your salvation in the first place – it was a gift of God's grace to you.

If we look to the first martyr of the Church – Stephen – we might expect that Stephen would enjoy much glitter and gold of the world since he enjoyed great favor of the Lord and the Church; but, nonsense! Stephen suffered rejection and persecution in the trail of his Master's cross just as you and I may expect. Stephen was hounded and finally stoned to death by the Jewish rulers. It was a horrible death for man, but a precious one in the eyes of the Lord who favored Stephen with a vision from Heaven at the moment of His falling asleep in Christ.

Christ has commanded us to feed the hungry, care for the widows and orphans, visit those in chains. . . . this is the most direct means of giving to God. He desires charitable hearts of His subjects:

AND before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: **33** And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. **34** Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: **35** For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: **36** Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. **37** Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? **38** When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? **39** Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? **40** And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. **41** Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: **42** For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: **43** I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. **44** Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? **45** Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. **46** And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Matt 25:32-46)

The favor of the Lord is not measured in worldly possessions or prestige, but upon the treasure of goods on deposit in Heaven where neither moth nor rust can destroy.

We are not able to boast of our good works, but we do not keep them secret either. These good works we do are not our own, but belong to the Lord who works in us. They are a testimony of our faith and to whom we claim as Lord and Master. The widow did not secretly cast in her two mites at the Temple, but openly. The point was not the amount in the offering, but the riches of the heart that cast them in. Our good works are outward evidence of our inward grace. If being seen of men is our primary motive, then our reward will be with men who perish in the earth and not with God. But if our motive is to serve God and show kindness to His creatures, then our reward will be in Heaven. This is the favor of God. Who will you be found standing with on the Last Day – the SHEEP, or the GOATS?