

Galatians

Favor with God

Galatians 3:10-14

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Favor with God

Scripture

Some time ago *The Wisconsin State Journal* surveyed Vice Presidents and Personnel Directors of the nation's largest corporations for their most unusual experiences interviewing prospective employees. Their stories included the following:

- A job applicant who challenged the interviewer to arm wrestle with him.
- A job candidate who said he had never finished high school because he had been kidnapped and kept in a closet in Mexico.
- A balding candidate who excused himself, then returned wearing a full hairpiece.
- A candidate who wore earphones to the interview and, when asked to remove them, explained that she could listen to the interviewer and the music at the same time.
- A candidate who said she didn't have time for lunch, then started to eat a hamburger and fries in the interviewer's office.
- An applicant who interrupted the questioning to phone her therapist for advice.
- A candidate who dozed off during the interview.
- A candidate who muttered, "Would it be a problem if I'm angry most of the time?"

These people sound pretty incompetent, don't they? Yet it is not a stretch to say this is the same sort of incompetence we all bring to God when we want to find favor with God.¹

¹ *The Wisconsin State Journal*, reprinted in Parade.

Today I would like to continue our series in Paul's letter to the Galatians. In the section we are going to study today, we shall see how we gain favor with God. Let us read Galatians 3:10-14:

¹⁰ All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." ¹¹ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Galatians 3:10-14)

Introduction

Have you ever noticed how hard we work at trying to get another person's approval?

People have an instinctive desire to have another person's approval. We long to have the approval of our neighbors and friends. A child desires the approval of her parents. An employee works hard for his employer's approval. All of us seek the approval of others even though we may not be self-conscious about our actions.

In similar fashion, people have an instinctive desire for the approval of God. People may not know his name (his name is *Yahweh*), but all over the world people are seeking the approval of the Divine. That is why every single people group on the face of the earth is religious in some way. Every person is either consciously or unconsciously seeking the approval of Yahweh, even though, paradoxically, the Bible tells us that we are by nature in revolt against him (cf. Romans 3:10-18).

The crucial question that every single religion in the world is attempting to answer is this one: *How do we find the approval of God? Or, how do we come into a right relationship with God?* The passage of Scripture before us, although it may be difficult in both concept and vocabulary, answers that crucial question.

Before we answer the question from the passage of Scripture, I want you to notice the description of a person who has found the approval of God. A person who has found the approval of God is described in two ways.

First, he is **justified before God** (3:11a). To be **justified before God** is the exact opposite of being condemned by him. As John Stott says, “It is to be declared righteous, to be accepted, to stand in his favor and under his smile.”² A person who is **justified before God** has found *favor* with God.

Second, a person who has found the approval of God is described in this way: He **will live** (3:11b). The life referred to here is not physical and biological, but spiritual and eternal. It is not the life of this age, but the life of the age to come. The simplest and clearest definition of eternal life comes from Jesus himself: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). A person who **will live**, who has eternal life, has found *fellowship* with God.

So, “justification” means to be in *favor* with God. “Eternal life” means to be in *fellowship* with God. The two are inseparably related. We cannot be in fellowship with God until we are in favor with him. And once we are in favor with him, fellowship is granted to us too.

Lesson

Now, we come to answer the crucial question: *How do we find the approval of God? How do we come into a right relationship with God? Or, how can we enter the favor and fellowship of*

² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 77.

God? In Paul's terms, how can we be **justified** and **live**? The passage of Scripture before us answers this crucial question, plainly and unequivocally.

I. The Condemnation of the Law (3:10-12)

First, notice the condemnation of the law.

The apostle Paul writes in Galatians 3:10-12: **“All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’ Clearly no-one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’ The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’”**

Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians to refute the teaching of the Judaizers. The essence of the Judaizers' teaching is what we call *legalism*. Legalism says that the way to find the approval of God is through *our complete obedience to his law*.

And so the Judaizers taught that in order for a person to enter into the favor and fellowship of God he needed **to do everything written in the Book of the Law**. Paul strongly disagrees by saying that **all who rely on observing the law are under a curse**. And he supports his statement by paraphrasing Deuteronomy 27:26: **“Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”**

Paul's use of Deuteronomy 27:26 beautifully shows the utter impossibility of obedience to the law—even the law of God—as a means of entering into favor with him. Why? Three reasons.

First, anyone seeking favor with God by means of obedience to the law must **continue** everlastingly at it. There is no respite for the legalist. He must continue day after day to obey the law.

Second, he must continue **to do everything**. He must obey the law 100%. He cannot stop short of 100% obedience to the law. He cannot pick and choose which of the commandments he will

obey and which he will not obey. He must do everything in order to enter God's favor.

And third, he must continue to do everything **written in the Book of the Law**. The legalist must not only obey the moral law of God, that is, the Ten Commandments. He must obey the entire Law, including the ceremonial law. What a burden!

Do you see that obedience to the law of God as a means of entering into favor with him is utterly impossible? You and I are incapable of perfectly obeying the law of God.

Paul states that **everyone** who does in fact try to earn favor with God by attempting **to do everything written in the Book of the Law is cursed**. The word **cursed** does not mean "to denounce," but actually "to reject." Disobedience to the law of God always brings us under the curse of God, and exposes us to the awful penalties of his judgment.

Paul continues his argument in 3:11: **Clearly no one is justified before God by the law**. Favor with God does not come by means of obedience to **the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."** Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 as proof that favor with God comes not by obedience to **the law** but **by faith**. The legalist tries to earn favor with God by obeying **the law**. Paul says that a person enters into favor with God **by faith**.

What we have here are two roads to entering into favor with God. The first promises life to the *doer*, the second to the *believer*. The first makes obedience the way of salvation, the second faith. The first implies that we can make it by ourselves, the second says that only God can justify (because the whole purpose of faith is to trust God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves).

You see, legalism and faith are mutually exclusive as a means of entering into favor with God. Paul says in 3:12a: The law is not based on faith. Hypothetically, a person could enter into favor with God if he perfectly obeyed the law. This is what Paul is saying in 3:12b, which is a citation from Leviticus 18:5: **"The man who does these things** (i.e. who obeys the law) **will live by them."** However, both Scripture (cf. Romans 3:23) and our own

experience tell us that we are utterly incapable of obeying the law. And so any attempts at even trying to obey the law as a means of earning God's favor bring us under condemnation. The law never brings life. Its purpose is to condemn.

So, if the law brings us under condemnation, and if it brings us under the curse of God, how can we be set free from the curse?

II. The Cure of Christ (3:13-14)

We can be set free from the condemnation of the law by the cure of Christ.

Paul writes in Galatians 3:13-14): **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”**

Paul introduces Christ as the cure. He tells us that it is **Christ** who has **redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us**.

The word **redeemed** was a word commonly used of buying a slave's freedom. **Christ** justifies those who place their faith in him by buying them back from their slavery to sin. The price he paid was the only one sufficient to redeem us, the “precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19).

Christ redeemed us . . . by becoming a curse for us, that is, he bore the personal judgment of God. The curse of 3:10 that was resting upon us was transferred to **Christ**. He took it voluntarily upon himself, in order to deliver us from it. When Christ died on the cross, he bore the penalty of our sin and not his own. When he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” he had lost favor with his Father and their fellowship was broken. And this happened, not because of *his* sin, but because of *our* sin.

Paul now adds Scriptural confirmation to what he had just said about the cross. He quotes Deuteronomy 21:23: **for it is writ-**

ten: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” Criminals executed under the Law of Moses were usually stoned and then hung on a tree as a symbol of divine rejection. A person who was under the curse of God was hung on a tree.

Perhaps you can appreciate a little more now why the Jews had such a hard time believing that Jesus was the Messiah. How could the Messiah, the anointed One of God, instead of reigning on a throne, be hanged on a tree? It was incredible to them. It just did not make sense. The fact that Jesus died hanging on a tree remained for Jews an insurmountable obstacle to faith . . . until they saw that the curse he bore was not *his* curse but *their* curse! That is why those two words **for us** are so important in 3:13. Christ did not die for his own sins; he became a curse **for us**.

Does that mean that everybody has been redeemed from **the curse of the law** through the sin-bearing, curse-bearing cross of Christ? No! Verse 13 must not be read without verse 14, where it is says that **he redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. Christ Jesus bore the curse of the law. The curse of the law is lifted from us by faith**, that is, when we trust in Jesus Christ and what he has done for us.

Dr. D. James Kennedy, pastor of the Coral Ridge PCA church, defines **faith** in the following way: **Faith** is “trusting in Jesus Christ *alone* for the gift of eternal life.” He stresses the adverb *alone* to indicate that the gift of eternal life is received by trusting in Jesus Christ plus nothing else. **Faith** is looking to Christ *alone* for the gift of eternal life.

It is very striking to see the contrast between the curse and the blessing in verses 13 and 14. We read that Christ became a curse for us so that we might inherit **the blessing. The blessing given to Abraham** includes justification (being put into favor with God), eternal life (being received into fellowship with God), and **the promise of the Spirit** (being regenerated and indwelt by him).

Conclusion

Paul sets before us a stark contrast: two destinies and two roads.

A. Two Destinies

Paul calls the two destinies “blessing” and “curse.”

Now, we come to answer the crucial question: *How do we find the approval of God? How do we come into a right relationship with God? Or, how do we enter the favor and fellowship of God?* In Paul’s terms, how can we be **justified** and **live**? The passage of Scripture before us answers this crucial question, plainly and unequivocally.

All of us live under the blessing of God or the curse of God. Only those who live under the blessing of God have entered into the favor and fellowship of God.

B. Two Roads

Paul tells us that there are two roads. The first road is called “the law.” Those who travel that road are those ‘who rely on observing the works of the law’ (3:10). They are under a curse.

The second road is called faith. Those who travel that road are people of faith (cf. 3:7, 9). They inherit the blessing.

The first group trusts their own works. The second trusts in the finished work of Christ.

Imagine that you just found out you have a rare and terminal illness. You sit down with your doctor.

“Is there no hope?” you ask.

“Well,” he says, “there is one thing. Without this one thing, it’s over. But with this one thing, you will be completely healed. But let me be utterly clear: It’s impossible for you to live without this one thing.”

What would you say?

“Listen, Doc, you’re boring me. My favorite sitcom is starting in five minutes, and I wouldn’t miss it for anything. I don’t have time for these silly cat-and-mouse games. See you!”

Or, “Well. . . that’s interesting. But, Doctor, that’s your opinion. You are completely entitled to it, and I’m sure it makes you feel better for having expressed it. But I resent your attempt to impose it upon me. I really don’t need this kind of psychological blackmail, this medical fascism. Good-bye and good riddance.”

Or, “What? What is it? Tell me now! I have to know, and I won’t leave until I do!”

Of course, the only sane response is the last one.

If we are saved by faith, and if we live by faith, and if it is impossible to please God without faith, the only sane response is: “What is it? What is this faith? You have to tell me! I have to know, and I’m not leaving until I do!”³

The challenge of this passage of Scripture is clear. We must renounce the foolish notion that we can establish our own righteousness or make ourselves earn the approval of God. Instead we must come humbly to the cross, where Christ bore the curse of God for us, and cast ourselves entirely upon his mercy. And then, by God’s sheer grace, because we are in Christ Jesus by faith, we shall receive justification, eternal life and the indwelling Holy Spirit. The blessing of Abraham will be ours. Amen.

³ Mark Buchanan, *Things Unseen* (Multnomah Press, 2002), 140-141.

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develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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