

Proverbs 3:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

Analysis

So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. This verse is the divine promise that follows the exhortations to trust in the LORD (v. 5-6) and honor Him with wealth (v. 9-10). The Hebrew word for "favour" is *chen* (חֵן), which denotes grace, acceptance, and goodwill—an unmerited gift that opens doors and creates opportunities. "Good understanding" translates *sekel tov* (שֵׂכֶל טוֹב), meaning sound judgment, insight, and success that comes from wise discernment.

The dual audience—"in the sight of God and man"—is critical. True biblical wisdom does not create conflict between divine approval and human respect. Unlike worldly cunning that may win human favor while offending God, or rigid religiosity that pleases God while alienating people, genuine wisdom cultivates both vertical relationship with God and horizontal relationships with others. This echoes the description of young Jesus, who "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

The verse promises that faithfulness to God's wisdom principles (keeping mercy and truth, trusting God, honoring Him with resources) results in a reputation of integrity and competence. Joseph found favor with Potiphar, the prison warden, and Pharaoh (Genesis 39-41). Daniel found favor with Babylonian officials (Daniel 1:9). This favor is not manipulative charm but the natural result of character shaped by wisdom. When we live according to God's design, both God and discerning people recognize and respect it.

Historical Context

Proverbs 3 belongs to the opening instructional section (chapters 1-9) where a father teaches his son the foundational principles of wisdom. In ancient Israel's patriarchal culture, **fathers bore primary responsibility for training sons** in the covenant way of life, passing down not merely religious rituals but practical skills for navigating society successfully.

The promise of finding favor "in the sight of God and man" would resonate deeply in Israel's honor-shame culture, where reputation and social standing profoundly impacted one's ability to function in community. Unlike modern individualistic cultures that prioritize personal fulfillment, ancient Near Eastern societies valued **honor, reputation, and communal harmony**. A person who enjoyed both divine blessing and human respect possessed true success.

Archaeological discoveries from the ancient Near East reveal widespread wisdom literature across cultures (Egyptian Instructions of Amenemope, Mesopotamian wisdom texts), but Israel's wisdom distinctively anchors ethical behavior in covenant relationship with Yahweh. While neighboring cultures offered pragmatic advice for social success, **Proverbs insists that true favor begins with fearing the LORD** (1:7; 9:10). The dual favor promised here is impossible apart from righteous character rooted in relationship with God.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does understanding that both divine approval and human respect flow from the same wise character challenge compartmentalized spirituality?
2. In what specific areas of life (work, family, church) might you be pursuing human favor at the expense of God's approval, or vice versa?

3. How does Jesus Christ perfectly embody this dual favor, and how does union with Him secure our acceptance before God and transform our relationships with others?
4. What practical steps can you take this week to demonstrate both mercy and truth (v. 3) in your relationships, knowing this cultivates favor?
5. How might the pursuit of this dual favor guard against both worldly compromise and self-righteous isolation?

Interlinear Text

וְנִמְצָא	חַן	וְשִׂכָּל	טוֹב	בְּעֵינֵי	אֱלֹהִים
So shalt thou find	favour	understanding	and good	in the sight	of God
H4672	H2580	H7922	H2896	H5869	H430
וְאָדָם					
and man					
H120					

Additional Cross-References

Luke 2:52 (References God): And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

1 Samuel 2:26 (Parallel theme): And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men.

Psalms 111:10 (Good): The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.

Romans 14:18 (References God): For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

Acts 2:47 (References God): Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Genesis 39:21 (Parallel theme): But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

Daniel 1:9 (References God): Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

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