



## **Favoritism Forbidden**

***"If you show partiality, you commit sin."*** --James 2:9

Can you find a passage in Scripture where we are told to value people on the basis of how they look, the position they hold, who they're related to, or according to how much they have or have given? You can't can you? Today unfortunately, too many Christians succumb to the pressure of that repulsive Hollywood mindset as they measure a person's worth by whether they are good-looking; have beautiful hair, a clear complexion and a trim, bronzed body. Like the worldly, they value the person with the right make-an-arrival-car, the right pedigree, the cool clothes, the perfectly located home with a view and the up-to-date vogue jewelry ... merely because they have this "stuff." These things, of course, are not wrong to have, they are just temporal.

It's really easy for any of us to show partiality to a person who looks sharp and wears the latest houte culture, Milanese fashions isn't it? Our society just bombards us saying this stuff is what really matters. But God is no respecter of persons! He could care less about this junk that will rust, rip and rot away and He expects Christians to begin seeing others as He sees them! A person's real worth lies far beneath the surface. The Bible tells us that we were made in the very image of God and that it is ***"the hidden person of the heart"*** that God values (1 Pet. 3:4). Every Christian is God's favorite child – He loves us all the same.

People don't have to be physically attractive to acknowledge God in all their ways, or to be unselfish, merciful, and compassionate. It doesn't take having a supermodel's unblemished face to develop patience, virtue, wisdom, and courage. These are character qualities of truly beautiful people. In truth, nothing is more attractive than Christlikeness! Isn't that what you really long for?

***Beautiful lives are those that bear for other lives their load of care;  
Beautiful souls are those who show the love of Christ where'er they go.*** –Anonymous

**"You can know the true heart of a man by how they treat people who can do absolutely nothing for them." -- Anne Landers**

An average man attended a church regularly for several months, but he was always ignored. Because no one knew who he was, and he looked out-of-place with his old, worn-out threads, no one ever took the time to speak to him. He just seemed a bit too old to be dawning grunge attire. One Sunday as he took a seat in church, he intentionally left his ball cap on. As the music started, the pastor stood from his posh padded throne atop the massive red carpeted platform and he spied out over the audience something different. He noticed the man with the hat pretty quickly. So with the slight wave of two fingers towards his heart, he motioned for one of the deacons and asked him to tell the man that he forgot to remove his hat. When the deacon spoke to the man, he responded with a big smile and whispered, *"I thought that would do it. Thanks. I've attended this church for six months and you're the first person who has ever talked with me."*

Do we reach out to different types of people? Is the word welcome printed in our church bulletins? Is it written on your face? Sinners can tell if it is... does it apply to everyone or just to family?

Mahatma Gandhi also experienced that ecclesiastical oddity -- ever read from the autobiography of Gandhi? He wrote that during his early days of being a student, he actually read the Gospels seriously and he considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus Christ he could find a viable solution to the hideous caste system that was dividing the wonderful people of India.

So one Sunday, he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk with the venerable minister there about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher on duty refused to offer him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. *"If Christians have caste differences also,"* he stated, *"I might as well remain a Hindu."* That usher's creepy favoritism not only betrayed Jesus but it also turned a person away from trusting Him as Lord and Savior.

Ever check out James 2:1-13? The "prejudiced usher" described in this passage welcomed a wealthy visitor but insulted a poor one. Perhaps he felt he was zealously doing his job and merely carrying out the wishes of the church members. But he displayed bad manners, and he was guilty of serious lawbreaking. James said, ***"If you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker"*** (Jam. 9-11).

With all due respect, will you suffer me to ask a few pointed questions, Pastor? When people visit or serve in your church, are they treated equally or is it that graying visitor – that potential-new-tither who drove up in that shiny BMW – the one wearing Neiman-Marcus-business-casual (cha-ching) who receives the warmth of a hand-on-the-shoulder-welcome in your Narthex? Is your welcome given regardless of a person's race, age, family or social status? How do you do with that lower-class Christian janitor when the crowd is not there to observe your benevolent cordiality? How about the church's janitor? Do you inordinately pressure him in private for more to be done than is appropriate, get after him wrongly or speak down to him with a condescending holier-than-thou-attitude or do you thank him and give him honor in public when it's easy for everyone to see that he's doing a great job? Do you like to spend time with him as much as anyone? Do you give him a couple days off after working a large conference at your church? When he's scheduled to teach on Sunday night, do you make sure he has enough time off to prepare spiritually, or do you just do those types of things for family-member-ministers? How do you feel about that young sinner who barges in to give you a hug during your normal office time? Do you act like that from nine to five on Monday through Fridays or do you kind of fake a smile, feel agitated, ...like people of this caliber are simply annoying interruptions who are getting in God's way when you have important people to see? Being non-partial starts in a humble heart – it's about motives and how you view people.

How do you speak to your wife in public ...or in private? Is it pretty rough like you're snarling and snapping at a vicious dog? Do you give far more attention to one of your kids over another? How is it at work? Is ninety percent of your inner-office meeting-time spent with the same employee?

Do you carry grudges against all who see things differently that you ...like forever, but make it appear otherwise? Do people begin to wonder why the richest men in your organization are on the board ...along with family ...and anyone dissenting on that board for any reason is quickly marginalized, vilified and silenced? Do you feel pretty smug and untouchable in your high position because you're careful to come down hard on people behind closed doors?

How about you, Mr. Businessman or Mrs. businesswoman? May I dare to challenge your walk a bit? Are you more considerate of your young secretary or assistant's needs than you are of your own spouse's needs? Do you flirt at work or go to lunch with someone of the opposite sex alone? Are you home when your spouse expects you to be there and do you quickly give her or him a call when you'll be late? How do you speak to your wife and kids? How about when they are in front of their friends? Do your pre-teens feel respect for you? I won't ask about your teens. Does your wife want to work side-by-side with you in your ministry? Are you too busy at church (in an effort to win points with the leaders) to be close to your wife, kids and Jesus? Does your wife feel you are too busy? Do you feel that your church constrains you to be involved apart from each other too much even after you've worked apart from each other all week?

Do you read the Bible daily? Do you pray together even when you're not driving somewhere? Do you pray with your spouse or with others more often? How often do you blow up and cuss? Do your kids feel that you are living up to that Message you always preach at them? How are your family devotions coming? How often? When at church, do you wear rose colored glasses or carefully check the word and facts out for yourself? Do the top leaders at your church set the example in genuine inclusivity and caring? Do you? Whose responsibility do they consider this type of thing to be? How about you? Do you want to become like them? Are they grace-givers or grace-killers? Do you get the feeling they are more interested in the campus and it's maintenance than in the people and their needs? Does your pastor like to hang with you?--for what reason? Have you attempted to serve under him in some practical way and been put off? Do you feel it's biblical to attend a church where you are not liked by your pastor? Is this how it is or can he see potential in you? Does he encourage you? You certainly want your wife happy, but is she leading you or are you fulfilling your ministry there in the power of the Spirit? Are you living up to, or above your potential supernaturally? Are rivers of living water joyously flowing out of your life to satisfy real needs? Do you pray for and encourage the no-name workers in the sound booth, book store, children's ministry and kitchen with the Word at your church or just the big boys who like their family members to be in limelight? Do you feel they love the limelight more than the people or want to up-lift the people and see the attention and applause go to Christ?

How about you teens? Do your parents feel that you are living up to that Message you always preach at them as well?

We all know there are a lot of wonderful pastors and congregants doing a great job by faith, and we all need to support and encourage them. We know there are a lot of business people doing great, but it is also important to be on guard and not allow the pressure or group-think to rob us of the higher inclusive life of grace!

*God's love that drew salvation's plan embraces every class of man;  
It breaks the toughest racial wall because it offers Christ to all. --Dennis Dh*

I once heard that after the Civil War, General Robert E. Lee, a devout man of God, visited a church in Washington, D.C. and during the Communion time, he was seen kneeling beside an African American man. Later, when someone asked him how he could do that, Lee replied, "*My friend, all ground is level at the foot of the cross.*" What makes the ground so level? The terribleness of our sins, the dreadful price Jesus paid to forgive us and the extremely selfless love He has for all people. Neither favoritism nor prejudice can survive in soil from that kind of ground.

*No one is excluded from the circle of God's grace, we cannot get beyond  
His love and care; why then do we close our minds and turn away our face  
From all who in the gospel have a share? --Hess*

*Join hands, then, brothers of the faith, whate'er your race may be;  
Who serves my Father as a son is surely kin to me. --Oxenham*

Favoritism distorts what it sees, deceives when it talks, and destroys when it acts. Don't hate. Appreciate! Prejudice is just a lazy man's substitute for thinking. To keep from looking down on others, look up to the cross, my friend. Reach up to the unbiased Savior. A heart that is open to Christ will be open to all the people He died for!

Sometimes my wife and I have cut through the downtown cemetery next to the *Dallas Convention Center* after attending a function, to make a short-cut to get back to our parked car. But every time we did this it took us some time. We've had to slow down as we became intrigued by the variety of grave markers and noticing what's written upon them. They clearly revealed the social status of each Texan who died and was buried beneath each one. Not to come off as recklessly macabre, but graveyards can really be fascinating! We've seen crypts, faded plastic flowers sticking-up out of the dirt, gray stone buildings with ornate granite carvings, wall drawers, iron scrollwork ...and then there's the family name prominently displayed up high for all to admire. Pillars, statues, fountains and large, ornamental obélisques are often nearby. But then you come to another section -- rows and rows of cheaper, basic vertical and horizontal headstones. These were small, flat, plain-stone markers indicating the graves of the poor. Some markers of course were originally made of wood and were eventually replaced. But nobody seems to care about these ones as these econo-blocks start to crack, sink or lean over in our sun drenched, expansive soil.

As I recall those days, I'm reminded of a cemetery in Germany fairly near to where we lived as missionaries called *God's Acre*. A young nobleman, Herr Graf Zinzendorf (1700-1760) once opened his estate to religious refugees from Moravia. Many got saved there and he gave them the freedom to worship God as they wished. In time, that little enclave became a worldwide, praying, missionary movement that sent witnessing Christians to Greenland, South Africa and Surinam in South America (I'm talking about *die Evangelische Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinshaft* a.k.a. the Moravians).

Each person buried in their cemetery, prince or pauper, count or coal miner, had an identical plain white headstone. Think about how cool this was! It underscored their conviction that all believers in Christ are spiritually equal in their standing before God. They took seriously the teaching of James 2:1 that we are not to treat one another with "partiality," cronyism or nepotism.

*In Jesus Christ we all are equal, for God's Spirit makes us one;  
As we give each other honor, we give glory to His Son. —Fitzhugh*

Maybe you've attended or worked in a church ...maybe in a small mom n' pop business where nepotism runs rampant to the hurt of many? Maybe there was an unwritten rule there, "*All who don't bow and accept this set-up will be labeled 'a jealous Cain' and be out on their ear!*" To the ongoing bewilderment of some, the attrition rate only seems to increase in places like these. Have you been ostracized or beat up in the Name of Jesus? If you can relate, or have suffered some form of spiritual abuse please come to Christ! He won't do you wrong. Beloved, just know that God hates this kind of weirdness and that His Kingdom isn't like that. Jesus' arms are opened wide to all who will come to Him. Well meaning religious leaders can paint Christ as harsh, but He cares for you. All His followers are as "insider" as insiders can get. Are there different ranks in God's army to show respect towards? Sure, but the church remains His even when men forget that, and when bishops discount it for their own aggrandizement.

Non-favoritism is about fairness and properly representing a humble but strong Lord. Eli the priest showed unfairness to the people by being partial toward his sons and many suffered for it. He would merely reason with his corrupt womanizing sons (1 Sam 2:12, 22) but he didn't really do anything so stop

them. There were no real consequences applied. Who knows how long Eli failed to properly discipline his PKs (preacher kids). It's clear God hated their sins. The Lord said, "***In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.***" (1 Sam 3:12-13 nkjv).

Chuck Smith the gracious founder of the *Calvary Chapel Movement* said, "God is fair. He is just in all his ways. Many people say that His 'Pastors must be fair' and they are right. They really should be!"

George Sanchez says "The Bible doesn't tell us that 'In the long run, God is fair' with these exact words, but it does clearly tell us that He is fair and just in all his ways."

King David didn't restrain Amnon or Absalom because he too was guilty of moral corruption. He basically looked the other way and didn't dissuade Adonijah from doing wrong.

Isaac and Rebecca showed partiality in their home with their boys and what followed? Big problems! Favoritism and the frustrations of those in authority showing it, has held back and wrecked many a church, but when we do things the Bible way, we get Bible results. Look at what happened with the church in Acts. Jacob learned this behavior too and treated his son Joseph with partiality. Partially can blind a parent's judgment so much that they can blame everyone but their preferred darling until the cows come home ..for all the problems they bring upon themselves. But the Bible says we all reap what we sow. We need to sow the good seed of the Word the way Jesus wants us to. Of course there are different reasons why parents show partiality to one or a couple kids over the others and all too often the child or children favored are much too immature to deal with the promotions or extra benefits ...whatever is given them. They can become majorly puffed up and wrongly dictatorial. It can literally spoil them to the injury of many and it hurts to see other leaders wiped out. Not a novice...right? But we can forgive because we all have imperfect vision and God's love is big enough.

*Forgive us, Lord, for unfair partiality. Remove its subtle lie; remind us that it was for everyone, You sent Your Son to die!*

Let's face it; nobody wins when we play favorites.

Have Kurt's fishing devos blessed you? Click on the "Contact" button and let him know!

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