

FAVOURITISM IS A SIN!

Today's Text: James 2:1-13

Extracts:

My brethren do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonoured the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all* [James 2: 1-10]

In the TV series, *Hand of God*¹ (first aired September 4, 2015), a corrupt judge, Pernell Harris, suffered a breakdown when his only son went into a coma after trying to kill himself. He believed that God was compelling him to seek vengeance. He became a born-again Christian and joined an evangelical church, Hand of God. Soon after, he presided over a case where the accused was a serial criminal. He deserved maximum sentence on the charges before the court. When Judge Harris gave the accused the chance to speak before passing the judgement, the accused claimed that he was sorry, that he had given up crime and become born-again in the church, Hand of God. But the offense for which he was being tried happened a few days after his born-again experience. To the shock of most people in the courtroom, Judge Harris said, "You are free; you can go."

Was that ruling based on rule of law or favouritism? Do you know how many such decisions most of us make each new day? In today's study, James is telling us that favouritism is a sin. Let's find out more!

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hand_of_God_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hand_of_God_(TV_series)). Story based on my viewing of the series on Amazon Video.

1. Background: Favouritism is a major crisis!

According to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*, favouritism can be defined as unfair support shown to one person or group, especially by someone in authority.² The key word there is “unfair,” implying that such support is not based on law or standard or principle. We do not need to go far to cite examples of favouritism in practice.

In families and among friends, we can see favouritism at play. The friends that we like the best may be the backbiters and talebearers! Some parents favour the wayward children over the obedient and hardworking ones. For example, King David's favourite son was the rebel, Absalom, who later sent his father into exile. Even after his rebellion had been put down and Absalom killed, David cried, “O my son Absalom-my son, my son Absalom-if only I had died in your place!” The people were discouraged because their victory had been turned into mourning [2 **Sam.18:32-19:2**].

There is a growing call among politicians in Europe and America for checks on immigration. A careful look suggests that this is a form of favouritism based on colour of skin or mode of worship. Ethnic cleansing is widespread in different parts of the world as one group tries to impose its way of life on minorities. Favouritism is more pronounced in the church and social settings. For example, pastors pay more attention to rich members who pay fat tithes. It may not matter that such members break all the norms of righteousness. Such infractions are treated with benign neglect!

In the Bible text that we are looking at today, James drew our attention to favouritism in places of worship. He writes [**Jam. 2: 1-4**]:

My brethren do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Such practices are more common than we may admit. It happens at school, in the office and in politics. We show favouritism on the basis of race, gender and creed, most times unconsciously. For example, look at what Apostle Peter did in the Gentile church at Antioch. Before some disciples (who were Jews) joined him from Jerusalem, he had mixed freely with the congregation and they ate together. But, as soon as the Jews joined them, Peter withdrew and separated himself from the Gentiles. Even Barnabas, Paul's travelling partner, found himself also playing

² <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/favouritism>

the hypocrite. Paul withstood Peter to his face for falling into the same trap [**Gal. 2: 11-14**].

James is emphatic in reminding us that “if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors, for *whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all*” [**Jam. 2: 9-10**]. We may think that we are not doing badly because we have avoided the “big ones,” such as fornication or adultery or murder. Has it ever occurred to you that favouritism is in the same category as those other “big” sins? We have to deal with it before it deals with us.

2. How to deal with favouritism

The following suggestions may be helpful in dealing with favouritism:

a) *Know God’s word on the matter*

There are two issues here: (i) What is God’s word on favouritism? (ii) What is God’s word on the issue where you are facing a favouritism challenge?

In acknowledging God’s justice, Elihu, the young man who came among the three elders who had come to comfort Job said, “[God] is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of His hands” [**Job 34: 19**]. When Peter came to Cornelius’ house, he opened his mouth and said, “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” [**Acts 10: 34-35**]. Paul adds, “There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus [**Gal. 3: 28**]. Clearly, we must operate in the realm of impartiality. As born-again, we have been crucified with Christ. Christ lives in us and the life which we now live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us [**Gal. 2: 20**].

Therefore, no matter the issue that we may be dealing with- at home, in the church, at work, etc.-God has already spoken on it in His word as recorded in His holy book and through His Son, Jesus Christ [**Heb. 1: 1-2**]. For example, Adonijah was the immediate younger brother to Absalom, King David’s favourite son that had staged an unsuccessful rebellion against him. As the king advanced in age, Adonijah exalted himself, saying, “I will be king.” We are told that David did not rebuke him “at any time.” The young man then took practical steps to actualize his dreams. That was when Nathan the prophet challenged the king to do what God had said on the matter [**1 Kgs 1: 1-27**]. In deed, God had earlier made known to David that He had chosen Solomon to sit on the throne of

the kingdom of the LORD over Israel [**1 Chron. 28: 5-7**]. Since God had spoken clearly on the matter, David had no hesitation in proclaiming Solomon his successor [**1 Kgs 1: 28-47**].

The Psalmist writes, “Exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another” [Ps.**75:6-7**]. For example, instead of appreciating God’s favour in putting him in charge of a global empire, Nebuchadnezzar remained proud. God turned him mad with the mind of a beast for seven years “in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men [and] gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men [**Dan. 4:1-17**]. Therefore, the position of authority that you are using to promote favouritism is from Him. Following His will in all that you do will be for your own benefit.

b) Pray for God’s guidance and wisdom at decision time

Even where God’s word in the Bible permits you to do what you plan to do, it is still helpful to ask for direct guidance on a case by case basis. For example, when God wanted to replace King Saul with a new king, He said to the prophet, Samuel, “I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king *among his sons*.” We are told, “So Samuel did what the LORD said.” He went to Bethlehem and sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice he had come to offer. When the prophet looked at Eliab, Jesse’s first son, he said, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before Him!” But God immediately spoke to Samuel not to look at physical features but the heart. In the end, NONE of the seven of Jesse’s sons present was picked. They had to send for the youngest, David, who was tending the sheep in the field and anointed him in succession to Saul [**1 Sam. 16: 1-13**].

So you plan to show favour to people around you? You have to answer a few critical questions. Is it for my self-aggrandizement or self-enrichment or to glorify God? Is it based on merit or favouritism? What is God’s position on the matter? Have I put it to Him in prayer? Will my action glorify Him? Unless and until you have received clearance, it is not advisable to pursue the matter further.

c) Do the right thing no matter what!

God has put you in a position to hire new employees or award huge contracts. Rich parents and guardians are tempting you with fat bribes to accept their recommendations/choices. Your village elders and pastors are sending you “special lists” which are drawn from their members’ families. What are you going to do? You should do the right thing no matter what.

Take the example of Joshua. He succeeded Moses and brought the children of Israel to the Promised Land. How was his inheritance determined? Did he lord over everyone? Did he select the choicest places for himself and his favourites? No! Here is what happened [**Josh. 19: 49-50**]:

When they had made an end of dividing the land as an inheritance according to their borders, *the children of Israel gave an inheritance among them to Joshua the son of Nun. According to the word of the LORD they gave him the city which he asked for, Timnath Serah in the mountains of Ephraim; and he built the city and dwelt in it.*

In the evening of his life, Joshua enjoined his people to fear God and serve Him in sincerity and in truth. They should choose between serving the true God and the idols in their new land. “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” [**Josh. 24: 13-15**].

Therefore, it is better for you to do the right thing, no matter what. Your position of authority or influence will not last forever. One day, you will retire or be removed. Once you are no longer in control, those confidential files you thought were inaccessible will be thrown open and your secrets will be openly disclosed. You will be greeted with retrospective disappointment, not appreciation. Therefore, do the right thing, no matter what!

In sum, favouritism is a sin which may look innocent on the surface but it can spoil our records in the sight of God and man.

3. Conclusion: It takes only one sin to go to hell!

In the *Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector*, which Jesus told some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others, two persons went up into the temple to pray. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus: “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.” The tax collector, on the other hand, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven. With a contrite spirit, he said, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” The tax collector, not the Pharisee, went home justified [**Lk 18: 9-17**].

People who play favouritism are more like the Pharisee than the tax collector. In today’s Bible text, *James has warned us that it takes only one sin to go to hell! Favouritism is a sin and it can take us to hell. So, deal with it before it deals with you!*