

Favoritism

Richard F. Melka, Ph.D.

Favoritism is defined as preferential treatment. It is commonly exhibited by people in their relationships and dealings with others. While *God shows favors to whom he will*¹, Scripture is quite clear on how we are to deal with this issue. *My brothers, your faith in our glorious Jesus Christ must not allow of favoritism.*²

The reason for this warning has many facets to it. It is usually quite obvious to others when favoritism is shown and therefore can easily cause resentments. A leader or *king will favor the intelligent servant*,³ but if he shows favor out of insecurity, or envy, or appearances, or incompetence, or cultivates a judgmental attitude, disharmony in the community will be the final result. The clear message is that *if you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*⁴

Another consequence of favoritism can be exemplified by a parable:

A rich man had to leave for a period of time and called his servants together. He chose three and gave them discretion over handling his affairs. Upon returning after a long period he gathered all together and called to account what the chosen ones had attained. He was clearly dissatisfied with what each had accomplished. A servant, not chosen, offered an explanation. "You gleefully noted that there is no problem finding servants to take on responsibilities but you choose by favoritism, those you know will never question your directions even if they believe you are in error, and in doing so you neglect fairness and ability and therefore you reap accordingly."

A recent article noted that oftentimes persons in positions of authority do not choose the best qualified for subordinate positions as they would rather have strict allegiance to their leadership rather than honest and independent appraisal as well as a creative competition of ideas. Creating a community of sycophants is not a good thing. Sycophants (Webster's dictionary defines them as "servile self-seeking flatterers") are not spiritual people for their only virtue is obedience. Such people do not represent in any way the teachings or the person of the historical Jesus who chose to stand up to power rather than amassing it.

Work is a noble thing and gives a man honor and dignity. Persons in authority are versed in fundamental principles of psychology and in playing favorites they know how to make the workplace an unpleasant place for workers being discriminated against. A spiritual author⁵ writes, "...if a man is not treated for that which he is, his work begins to become a hundred times more burdensome and at times unbearable."

I'm reminded of the parable where the servant owing much is forgiven but in turn is merciless towards another who owes much less; he is eventually brought to task for his uncompromising attitude.

¹ Exodus 33:19

² James 2:1

³ Proverbs 14:35

⁴ James 2:9

⁵ Msgr. Giussani, (2005) Founder of the ecclesial movement Communion and Liberation

People in leadership often owe their position to circumstances beyond their control and too often believe it is only their hard work and ability that brought them into authority, and then in turn are not able or simply refuse to recognize the ability of others: there is always someone better qualified waiting in the wings. If they discriminate because of age, race, or gender they fail in the role of proper leadership. *Don't ever be inflated with pride in favor of one person over against another. Who confers distinction upon you? What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it?*⁶

Consider what the prophets tell us of our God. *The Lord our God, is the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, and has no favorites.*⁷ *He is a God of justice who knows no favorites.*⁸ *With God there is no favoritism.*⁹ *The fruits of wisdom from above are impartial and sincere.*¹⁰

Paul reprimands the attitude of masters of slaves *because we all have the same Master in heaven who plays no favorites.*¹¹ *Whoever acts unjustly will be repaid for the wrong he has done. No favoritism will be shown.*¹²

If we are to seek favor, let it be from God for *each of us have received God's favor.*¹³ *Good sense brings favor,*¹⁴ *and the good person wins favor from the Lord.*¹⁵ And yet there is a mystery about this *for who is wise enough to observe these things and to understand the favors of the Lord?*¹⁶

⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:6b-7

⁷ Deuteronomy 10:17

⁸ Sirach 35:12

⁹ Romans 2:11

¹⁰ James 3:17

¹¹ Ephesians 6:9

¹² Colossians 3:25

¹³ Ephesians 4:7

¹⁴ Proverbs 13:15

¹⁵ Proverbs 12:2

¹⁶ Psalm 107:43