

Playing Favorites in Church

Favoritism is alive and well—and it hurts. I'll venture that we have all experienced being on the wrong end of someone's favoritism.

Favoritism at Home. Sure, parents say they love each child equally, and it would be taboo to even hint that you prefer one child over another. If we're honest, though, homes with multiple kids have one child that just seems to shine a little brighter than the others. It's easy to lean a little toward the child who is easier to get along with, does better in school, has an obvious talent, or never whines for the TV remote.

And whether such preferential treatment is real or not, the children think their parents play favorites. Unfortunately, such treatment can lead to depression that stays with them as adults.

Favoritism at School. For some of us, favoritism reared its head in the classroom. Even a sharp, good student can feel slighted if the teacher shows preferential treatment to another student. For others, favoritism was experienced by their peers in games and sports. I know. When choosing sides, the team captains would regularly fight over me. *"You take him." "No, you take him."*

Favoritism at Work. Favoritism doesn't go away when the acne does; it can follow us into adulthood.

- 75% have witnessed favoritism at work.
- 23% admit to having practiced favoritism.
- 83% say favoritism leads to bad decisions.

Top-level management apparently is not too concerned. Of the qualities they look for in leaders, only 38 percent of men said fairness is a top quality. Women in leadership fared better: 55 percent of them value fairness in those they hire.

Favoritism in the Community. There is no ethnic or racial group that has not been the victim of

prejudice and favoritism, and there is no ethnic or racial group that has not practiced prejudice and favoritism. I'm amazed that some of the people that scream the loudest about prejudice also show prejudice against others. Prejudice goes both ways.

Favoritism at Church. Thankfully, we can come to church, gather with other believers, and get away from the favoritism and preferential treatment at home, school, work, or the neighborhood.

We can, right? Hmmm.

- I've been in churches full of doctors, lawyers, and wealthy people who accepted others, but leadership went predominantly to the doctors, lawyers, and wealthy people.
- I've been in churches with a strong family feel. That sounds appealing, but unless you've been a part of the church family for a long time (i.e. decades), you're not fully accepted.
- Race, of course, can still be an issue in some regions, but in many urban and suburban areas, the dividing wall is not race but socio-economics.

This is nothing new. The first book of the New Testament to be penned was the Book of James, and in this highly practical letter, James dealt with the issue of favoritism in the 1st-century church.

"My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor person dressed in filthy clothes also comes in, if you look with favor on the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," haven't you made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (Jas. 2:1-4).

In a sense, world governments understand this. In setting up trade agreements and tariffs, a country can grant Most Favored Nation status to their allies and other friendly countries. Being a Most Favored Nation means your country receives the best trade terms. No other country is being offered a better deal, and if they were, your country must receive that better deal also. In other words, countries granted Most Favored Nation status are treated equally.

When Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia, he said something radically crazy to the first-century world:

"There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

God grants Most Favored Nation status to everyone who trusts in Christ. And so should we. We must step outside our comfort zones and build relationships with others in the church who are different from us.

- The quiet wallflower
- The divorced mother
- The socially awkward guy who dresses funny
- The man with dirt under his fingernails
- The immigrant with a strong accent
- _____

As individual believers, we can change the culture of the church. As we embrace others and treat them with Most Favored Nation status, we can pave the way for others in the church to do so. And when the church fully embraces anyone and everyone who comes to Christ and His church, the floodgates may just open. People who are tired of the favoritism at home, at work, and in the community will come running to a place that exhibits the love of Christ.