

Unmasking Idols: Five Ways the Early Church Was Known for Justice.

We all have favourites: favourite food, seasons, sports, music, clothes, comedians, car brands, and so on. But what about favouritism?

When something becomes an “-ism”, it takes a preference or behaviour and elevates it to the level of a doctrine or belief system. Think of examples like communism, terrorism, or Protestantism. When we take something that is a mere preference and elevate it to favouritism, we give that preference a weight it doesn't deserve, allowing it to become an ultimate thing. This, in turn, undermines our faith and trust in God. It should come as no surprise that God is very critical of favouritism.

Passage: Read James 1:19-2:4

Context of James: the author of this passage was the half-brother of Jesus, and he earned the nickname “James the Just.” His passion for justice is evident throughout his letter. Interestingly, James initially thought Jesus was out of His mind (Mark 3:21)—an understandable reaction to someone claiming to be God. But after Jesus' death and resurrection, James became a disciple.

The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to James (1 Corinthians 15:3-8), and after Peter, James became a key leader of the church in Jerusalem. When Paul visited Jerusalem to be recognised as an apostle, he said that James, Peter, and John extended “the right hand of fellowship” to him and Barnabas, requesting only that they “continue to remember the poor”—something Paul was already eager to do (Galatians 2:10).

Q: Why do you think remembering the poor was the “one thing” Paul and Barnabas were asked to focus on?

Q. James 2:1-9 In this passage, James condemns favouritism. What reasons does he give? Talk about it as a group.

There are three reasons that I see as to why James condemns Favouritism.

1. **Favouritism is inconsistent with God's Character.** Scripture repeatedly emphasises that God shows no partiality: - “For the Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awe-inspiring God, showing no partiality and taking no bribe” (Deuteronomy 10:17). - “For there is no favouritism with God” (Romans 2:11). - “There is no favouritism with Him” (Ephesians 6:9).

2. **Favouritism Undermines God's Justice.** James reminds his readers that God's values are not the world's values: "Didn't God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that He has promised to those who love Him? Yet you have dishonoured the poor" (James 2:5-6). James gets this idea from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31: *"Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things... so that no one may boast before Him."*

It's not that God doesn't want to save the wealthy. However, wealth and education can sometimes lead to a false sense of self-sufficiency, causing people to feel like they don't need God. When we practice favouritism, we start looking to others for our identity, security, and significance—things that should come from God alone. When favouritism takes root, justice is often the first casualty.

3. **Favouritism is Sin.** James is clear: favouritism is not just disrespectful—it's sinful. "If you show favouritism, you commit sin" (James 2:9). It's sinful because it goes against the character and commands of God.

But Didn't Jesus Have Favourites?

You might be thinking, "Didn't Jesus have favourites?" After all, it was common knowledge among the disciples that Jesus was closest to John. When Jesus predicted His betrayal, Peter asked John to find out more about this sensitive topic. So, is the Bible being contradictory?

On one hand, we're told not to show favouritism, but on the other, it seems like Jesus had people He was closer to.

Q: Can we have legitimate favourites without it turning into favouritism?

Q: What signs would indicate that you're crossing the line into favouritism?

Cultivating a Heart of Justice, cultivating the Father's heart.

In contrast to favouritism is the Father's heart that loves the whole world (John 3:16). As disciples of Jesus, who are following him, we have the Father's DNA. We naturally will want to see justice occur.

Q. Can you remember when God stirred your heart for a justice issue? What happened in you?

Justice practices

There are practices that can help us remember that God is not partial. One such practice is setting aside money to help the poor. If you've never considered giving to ministries that serve the poor and marginalised, here are two organisations to consider:

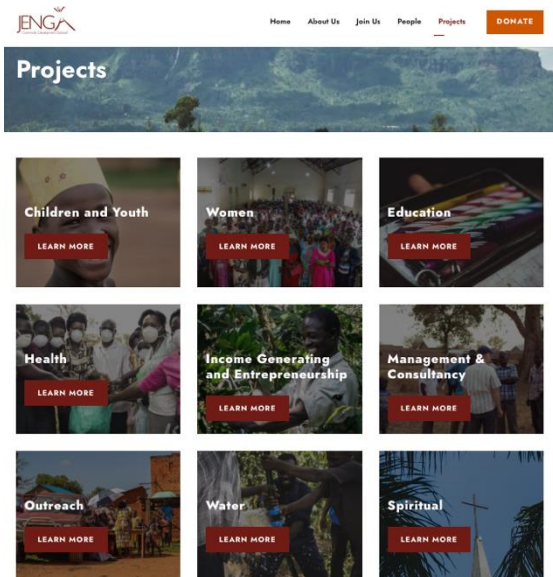
Avodah Global.

Avodah Global is a clothing business in Cambodia, started by two Australian women. They provide survivors of sex trafficking and other vulnerable people with training, support, and safe employment in an ethical and sustainable factory. They are doing amazing work in giving people dignity and life skills and seeing genuine life change.

Some of our mission team visited them in 2023. You can partner with them [here](#).



Jenga Uganda.



Jenga is an NGO in Eastern Uganda, involved in sustainable community development projects alongside church planting. Some of their initiatives include: - Women's savings programs - Education - Income generation (coffee, goats, business loans) - Health programs (drug and alcohol recovery, women's health, HIV support) - Water projects - Programs for children and youth You can visit their website to set up one-time or regular donations. Another way to support Jenga and other EGS (Evangelical Global Service) partners is through our "Kingdom Builders" fund. This fund consists of donations given above and beyond regular tithes, specifically designated for addressing injustice and spreading the gospel. You can find out how to donate to the EGS [here](#).

Are either of these groups organisations which you could support regularly in your desire to grow a heart for justice?

Otherwise...we have a social justice group at CBTB. Reach out to Bri Hopper about what they are doing in our area (0488 024 332, bri.hopper@outlook.com).

Spend some time identifying and praying for issues of injustice in our world.