



# favoritism

You

are

a

treasure

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## Forward

James condemns acts of favoritism. Often we treat a well-dressed, impressive-looking person better than someone who looks shabby. We do this because we would rather identify with successful people than with apparent failures.

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In addition, the rich find it difficult to identify with the Lord Jesus, who came as a humble servant. Are you easily impressed by status, wealth, or fame?

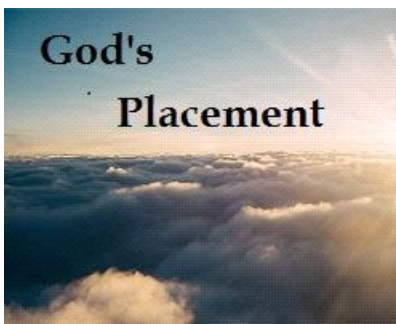
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Whatever our life style, favoritism is unacceptable to the teachings in the Scripture.

## Chapter 1



### **The elder shall serve the younger**

Genesis 25:19-24

This is the history of the family of Isaac, the son of Abraham. When Isaac was forty years old, he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram and the sister of Laban.

Isaac pleaded with the Lord to give Rebekah a child because she was childless. So the Lord answered Isaac's prayer, and his wife became pregnant with twins.

But the two children struggled with each other in her womb. So she went to ask the Lord about it. "Why is this happening to me?" she asked.

And the Lord told her, "The sons in your womb will become two rival nations. One nation will be stronger than the other; the descendants of your older son will serve the descendants of your younger son."

And when the time came, the twins were born.

Isaac inherited everything from his father, including God's promise to make his descendants into a great nation. As a boy, Isaac did not resist

as his father prepared to sacrifice him, and as a man, he gladly accepted the wife that others chose for him.

Through Isaac, we learn how to let God guide our life and place his will ahead of our own.

### **Plans to deceive**

Genesis 27:6-10

And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the Lord before my death.

Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee. Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth: And thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death.

### **Abraham favored Joseph**

Genesis 37:3-4

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

In Joseph's day, everyone had a robe or cloak. Robes were used to warm oneself, to bundle up belongings for a trip, to wrap babies, to sit on, or even to serve as security for a loan.

Most robes were knee length, short sleeved, and plain. In contrast, Joseph's robe was probably of the kind worn by royalty—long sleeved, ankle length, and colorful. The robe became a symbol of Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph, and it aggravated the already strained relations between Joseph and his brothers.

Favoritism in families may be unavoidable, but its divisive effects should be minimized. Parents may not be able to change their feelings toward a favorite child, but they can change their actions toward the others.

### **Hannah received a special portion**

1 Samuel 1:5-6

But he gave Hannah a special portion because he loved her very much, even though the Lord had given her no children.

But Peninnah made fun of Hannah because the Lord had closed her womb.

Hannah had been unable to conceive children, and in Old Testament times, a childless woman was considered a failure. Her barrenness was a social embarrassment for her husband.

Children were a very important part of the society's economic structure. They were a source of labor for the family, and it was their duty to care for their parents in their old age.

If a wife could not bear children she was often obligated, by ancient Middle Eastern custom, to give one of her servant girls to her husband to bear children for her.

Although Elkanah could have left Hannah (a husband was permitted to divorce a barren wife), he remained lovingly devoted to her despite social criticism and his rights under civil law.

### **Inheritance to be divided equally**

Deut. 21:15-16

"Suppose a man has two wives, but he loves one and not the other, and both have given him sons. And suppose the firstborn son is the son of the wife he does not love.

When the man divides the inheritance, he may not give the larger inheritance to his younger son, the son of the wife he loves.

Regardless of how a man felt about his children, he was compelled by law to follow the laws of inheritance.

### **Fairness in food distribution**

Acts 6:1

But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

When we read the descriptions of the early church—the miracles, the sharing and generosity, the fellowship—we may wish we could have been a part of this “perfect” church.

In reality, the early church had problems just as we do today. No church has ever been or will ever be perfect until Christ and his followers are united at his second coming.

All churches have problems. If your church’s shortcomings distress you, ask yourself: “Would a perfect church allow me to be a member?”

Then do what you can to make your church better. A church does not have to be perfect to be faithful.

Another internal problem developed in the early church. The Hebraic Jews, native Jewish Christians, spoke Aramaic, a Semitic language.

The Grecian Jews, Greek-speaking Christians, were probably Jews from other lands who were converted at Pentecost. The Greek-speaking Christians complained that their widows were being unfairly treated.

This favoritism was probably not intentional, but was more likely caused by the language barrier.

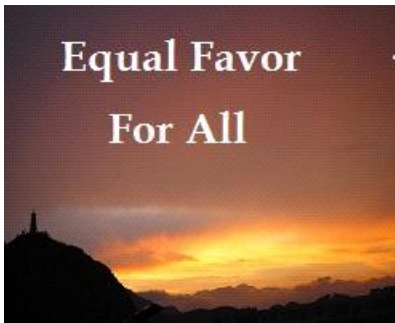
To correct the situation, the apostles put seven respected Greek-speaking



men in charge of the food distribution program.

This solved the problem and allowed the apostles to keep their focus on teaching and preaching the Good News about Jesus.

## Chapter 2



### **No special favor shown to the rich**

James 2:1-4

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim that you have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people more than others?

For instance, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in shabby clothes.

If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, doesn't this discrimination show that you are guided by wrong motives?

In this chapter James argues against favoritism and for the necessity of good deeds. He presents three principles of faith:

- (1) Commitment is an essential part of faith. You cannot be a Christian simply by affirming the right doctrines or agreeing with Biblical facts (James 2:19). You must commit your mind

and heart to Christ.

- (2) Right actions are the natural by-products of true faith. A genuine Christian will have a changed life (James 2:18).
- (3) Faith without good deeds doesn't do anybody any good—it is useless (James 2:14-17).

James's teachings are consistent with Paul's teaching that we receive salvation by faith alone. Paul emphasizes the purpose of faith—to bring salvation. James emphasizes the results of faith—a changed life.

James condemns acts of favoritism. Often we treat a well-dressed, impressive-looking person better than someone who looks shabby. We do this because we would rather identify with successful people than with apparent failures.

The irony, as James reminds us, is that the supposed winners may have gained their impressive life-style at our expense.

In addition, the rich find it difficult to identify with the Lord Jesus, who came as a humble servant. Are you easily impressed by status, wealth, or fame?

Are you partial to the “haves” while ignoring the “have nots”? This attitude is sinful. God views all people as equals, and if he favors anyone, it is the poor and the powerless. We should follow his example.

Why is it wrong to judge a person by his or her economic status? Wealth may indicate intelligence, wise decisions, and hard work. On the other hand, it may mean only that a person had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family. Or it can even be the sign of greed, dishonesty, and selfishness.

By honoring someone just because he or she dresses well, we are making appearance more important than character.

Sometimes we do this because

- (1) Poverty makes us uncomfortable; we don't want to face our responsibilities to those who have less than we do;
- (2) we want to be wealthy too, and we hope to use the rich person as a means to that end;
- (3) We want the rich person to join our church and help support it financially.

All these motives are selfish; they view neither the rich nor the poor person as a human being in need of fellowship.

If we say that Christ is our Lord, then we must live as he requires, showing no favoritism and loving all people regardless of whether they are rich or poor.

We are often partial to the rich because we mistakenly assume that riches are a sign of God's blessing and approval.

But God does not promise us earthly rewards or riches; in fact, Christ calls us to be ready to suffer for him and give up everything in order to hold on to eternal life (Matthew 6:19-21; Matthew 19:28-30; Luke 12:14-34; Romans 8:15-21; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

We will have untold riches in eternity if we are faithful in our present life (Luke 6:35; John 12:23-25; Galatians 6:7-10; Titus 3:4-8).

When James speaks about the poor, he is talking about those who have no money and also about those whose simple values are despised by much of our affluent society.

Perhaps the "poor" people prefer serving to managing, human

relationships to financial security, peace to power.

This does not mean that the poor will automatically go to heaven and the rich to hell.

Poor people, however, are usually more aware of their powerlessness. Thus it is often easier for them to acknowledge their need for salvation.

One of the greatest barriers to salvation for the rich is pride. For the poor, bitterness can often bar the way to acceptance of salvation.

### **Why it is wrong to show favoritism to the wealthy:**

1. It is inconsistent with Christ's teachings.
2. It results from evil thoughts.
3. It insults people made in God's image.
4. It is a by-product of selfish motives.
5. It goes against the Biblical definition of love.
6. It shows a lack of mercy to those less fortunate.
7. It is hypocritical.
8. It is sin.

## **Show no special favor to anyone**

1 Tim. 5:21

I solemnly command you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus and the holy angels to obey these instructions without taking sides or showing special favor to anyone.

Church leaders are not exempt from sin, faults, and mistakes. But they are often criticized for the wrong reasons—minor imperfections, failure to meet someone’s expectations, personality clashes.

Thus Paul said that accusations should not even be heard unless two or three witnesses confirm them.

Sometimes church leaders should be confronted about their behavior, and sometimes they should be rebuked. But all rebuking must be done fairly and lovingly, and for the purpose of restoration.

“Elect angels” are all those angels who did not rebel against God like Satan did.

We must be constantly on guard against favoritism, against giving preferential treatment to some and ignoring others. We live in a society that plays favorites.

It’s easy to give special treatment to those who are gifted, intelligent, rich, or beautiful without realizing what we are doing. Make sure you honor people for who they are in Christ, not for who they are in the world.

## **Neighbors to be judged fairly**

## Leviticus 19:15

"Always judge your neighbors fairly, neither favoring the poor nor showing deference to the rich.

God instructed the Hebrews to provide for those in need. He required that the people leave the edges of their fields unharvested, providing food for travelers and the poor.

It is easy to ignore the poor or forget about those who have less than we do. But God desires generosity. In what ways can you leave the “edges of your field” for those in need?

“Do not . . .” Some people think the Bible is anything but a book of don’ts. But Jesus neatly summarized all these rules when he said to love God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself.

He called these the greatest commandments (or rules) of all (Matthew 22:34-40). By carrying out Jesus’ simple commands, we find ourselves following all of God’s other laws as well.

People often find it easy to dismiss the opinions of the elderly and avoid taking time to visit with them. But the fact that God commanded the Israelites to honor the elderly shows how seriously we should take the responsibility of respecting those older than we. Their wisdom gained from experience can save us from many pitfalls.

How do you feel when you encounter foreigners (aliens), especially those who don’t speak your language?

Are you impatient? Do you think or act as if they should go back where they came from? Are you tempted to take advantage of them?

God says to treat foreigners as you'd treat fellow countrymen, to love them as you love yourself. In reality, we are all foreigners in this world, because it is only our temporary home.

View strangers, newcomers, and foreigners as opportunities to demonstrate God's love.

### **Testimony is not to be slanted**

Exodus 23:3

And do not slant your testimony in favor of a person just because that person is poor.

Justice is often perverted in favor of the rich. Here the people are warned against twisting justice in favor of the poor. Justice should be impartial, treating rich and poor alike.

Giving special privileges to either rich or poor only makes justice for everyone more unlikely. Withstand the pressure of the crowd to sway your decision about a person.

Let the fairness God shows to each of us guide your judgment.



## **Never twist justice**

Deuteronomy 16:19

You must never twist justice or show partiality. Never accept a bribe, for bribes blind the eyes of the wise and corrupt the decisions of the godly.

These verses anticipated a great problem the Israelites would face when they arrived in the Promised Land. Although they had Joshua as their national leader, they failed to complete the task and choose other spiritual leaders who would lead the tribes, districts, and cities with justice and God's wisdom.

Because they did not appoint wise judges and faithful administrators, rebellion and injustice plagued their communities. It is a serious responsibility to appoint or elect wise and just officials. In your sphere of influence—home, church, school, job—are you ensuring that justice and godliness prevail?

Failing to choose leaders who uphold justice can lead to much trouble, as Israel would discover.

## Chapter 3



### **The hart must be right**

Job 13:10

No, you will be in serious trouble with him if even in your hearts you slant your testimony in his favor.

Job compared his three friends to physicians who did not know what they were doing. They were like eye surgeons trying to perform open-heart surgery.

Many of their ideas about God were true, but they did not apply to Job's situation. They were right to say that God is just.

They were right to say God punishes sin. But they were wrong to assume that Job's suffering was a just punishment for his sin.

They took a true principle and applied it wrongly, ignoring the vast differences in human circumstances.

We must be careful and compassionate in how we apply Biblical condemnations to others; we must be slow to judge.

## **Wicked are never to shown special favor.**

Psalm 82:2

"How long will you judges hand down unjust decisions?  
How long will you shower special favors on the wicked?"

This psalm calls the rulers and judges of Israel “gods” and “sons of the Most High.”

They were called gods because they represented God in executing judgment. John 10:34-36 records Jesus using this passage to defend his claims to be God.

His argument was as follows: if God would call mere men “gods,” why was it blasphemous for him, the true Son of God, to declare himself equal with God?

## **Unjust decisions**

Proverbs 24:23

Here are some further sayings of the wise:  
It is wrong to show favoritism when passing judgment.

David, Solomon’s father, refused to gloat over the death of his lifelong enemy Saul (see 2 Samuel 1).

On the other hand, the nation of Edom rejoiced over Israel’s defeat and was punished by God for their attitude (Obadiah 1:12).

To gloat over others' misfortune is to make yourself the avenger and to put you in the place of God, who alone is the real judge of all the earth (see Deut. 32:35).

### **Partiality is never good**

Proverbs 28:21

Showing partiality is never good, yet some will do wrong for something as small as a piece of bread.

For many people, the rugged individualist is a hero. We admire the bold, self-directed men and women who know what they want and fight for it.

They are self-reliant, neither giving nor asking advice. What a contrast to God's way. A person can't know the future and can't predict the consequences of his or her choices with certainty. And so the totally self-reliant person is doomed to failure.

The wise person depends on God.

## Reward of disobedience

Malachi 2:9

"So I have made you despised and humiliated in the eyes of all the people. For you have not obeyed me but have shown partiality in your interpretation of the law."

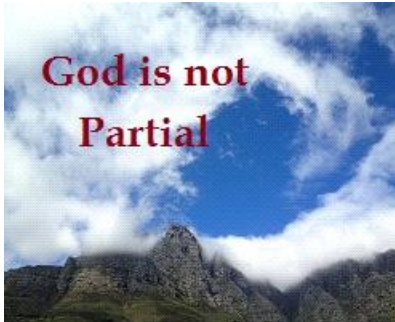
Malachi was angry at the priests because, though they were to be God's messengers, they did not know God's will. And this lack of knowledge caused them to lead God's people astray.

Their ignorance was willful and inexcusable. Pastors and leaders of God's people *must* know God's Word—what it says, what it means, and how it applies to daily life. How much time do you spend in God's Word?

The priests had allowed influential and favored people to break the law. The priests were so dependent on these people for support that they could not afford to confront them when they did wrong.

In your church, are certain people allowed to do wrong without criticism? There should be no double standard based on wealth or position. Let your standards be those presented in God's Word. Playing favorites is contemptible in God's sight (see James 2:1-9).

## Chapter 4



### God is not partial

Romans 2:11

For God does not show favoritism.

Although God does not usually punish us immediately for sin, his eventual judgment is certain. We don't know exactly when it will happen, but we know that no one will escape that final encounter with the Creator. For more on judgment, see John 12:48 and Rev. 20:11-15.

Paul says that those who patiently and persistently *do* God's will find eternal life. He is not contradicting his previous statement that salvation comes by faith alone (Romans 1:16-17). We are not saved by good deeds, but when we commit our lives fully to God, we want to please him and do his will. As such, our good deeds are a grateful *response* to what God has done, not a prerequisite to earning his grace.

## **God made all equal**

Job 34:19

He doesn't care how great a person may be, and he doesn't pay any more attention to the rich than to the poor. He made them all.

Although we might have a wealth of Bible knowledge and life experiences, we must make sure our conclusions are consistent with all of God's Word, not just parts of it.

## **God sends rain on the just and the unjust**

Matthew 5:45

In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too.

To many Jews of Jesus' day, these statements were offensive. Any Messiah who would turn the other cheek was not the military leader they wanted to lead a revolt against Rome. Since they were under Roman oppression, they wanted retaliation against their enemies, whom they hated.

But Jesus suggested a new, radical response to injustice: instead of demanding rights, give them up freely! According to Jesus, it is more important to *give* justice and mercy than to receive it.

By telling us not to retaliate, Jesus keeps us from taking the law into our own hands. By loving and praying for our enemies, we can overcome evil with good.

The Pharisees interpreted Leviticus 19:18 as teaching that they should love only those who love in return, and Psalm 139:19-22 and Psalm 140:9-11 as meaning that they should hate their enemies.

But Jesus says we are to love our enemies. If you love your enemies and treat them well, you will truly show that Jesus is Lord of your life.

This is possible only for those who give themselves fully to God, because only he can deliver people from natural selfishness. We must trust the Holy Spirit to help us *show* love to those for whom we may not *feel* love.

### **God accepts all who fear him.**

Acts 10:34-35

Then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God doesn't show partiality. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to the spread of the gospel in the first century was the Jewish-Gentile conflict. Most of the early believers were Jewish, and to them it was scandalous even to think of associating with Gentiles.

But God told Peter to take the gospel to a Roman, and Peter obeyed despite his background and personal feelings. (Later Peter struggled with this again—see Galatians 2:11-14.) God was making it clear that the Good News of Christ is for everyone!

We should not allow any barrier—language, culture, prejudice, geography, economic level, or educational level—to keep us from telling



others about Christ.

In every nation there are hearts restless for God, ready to receive the gospel—but someone must take it to them.

Seeking God is not enough—people must find him. How then shall seekers find God without someone to point the way? Is God asking you to show someone the way to him? (See Romans 10:14-15.)

### **Glory and honor those who do good**

Romans 2:10

But glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Although God does not usually punish us immediately for sin, his eventual judgment is certain. We don't know exactly when it will happen, but we know that no one will escape that final encounter with the Creator. For more on judgment, see John 12:48 and Rev. 20:11-15.

### **Goodness received back from the Lord**

Ephesians 6:8-9

Knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no

partiality with Him.

Paul's instructions encourage responsibility and integrity on the job. Christian employees should do their jobs as if Jesus Christ were their supervisor.

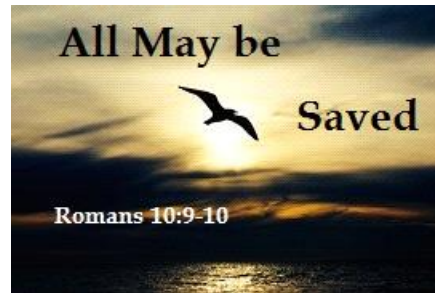
And Christian employers should treat their employees fairly and with respect.

Can you be trusted to do your best, even when the boss is not around?  
Do you work hard and with enthusiasm?

Do you treat your employees as people, not machines? Remember that no matter whom you work for, and no matter who works for you, the One you ultimately should want to please is your Father in heaven.

Although Christians may be at different levels in earthly society, we are all equal before God. He does not play favorites; no one is more important than anyone else. Paul's letter to Philemon stresses the same point: Philemon, the master, and Onesimus, his slave, were brothers in Christ.

## Chapter 5



### Salvation to all

Acts 15:7-9

At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: "Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe.

God, who knows people's hearts, confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he gave him to us.

He made no distinction between us and them, for he also cleansed their hearts through faith.

If the law was a yoke that the Jews could not bear, how did having the law help them throughout their history?

Paul wrote that the law was a guide that pointed out their sins so they could repent and return to God and right living (see Galatians 3:24-25). It was, and still is, impossible to obey the law completely.

## **All have the same Lord**

Romans 10:12-13

Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They all have the same Lord, who generously gives his riches to all who ask for them. For "Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Have you ever been asked, "How do I become a Christian?" These verses give you the beautiful answer—salvation is as close as your own mouth and heart. People think it must be a complicated process, but it is not. If we believe in our hearts and say with our mouths that Christ is the risen Lord, we will be saved

## **God does not tolerate perverted justice**

2 Chronicles 19:7

Fear the Lord and judge with care, for the Lord our God does not tolerate perverted justice, partiality, or the taking of bribes."

Jehoshaphat delegated some of the responsibilities for ruling and judging the people, but he warned his appointees that they were accountable to God for the standards they used to judge others.

Jehoshaphat's advice is helpful for all leaders:

- (1) realize you are judging for God (2 Chron. 19:6);
- (2) be impartial and honest (2 Chron. 19:7);

- (3) be faithful (2 Chron. 19:9);
- (4) act only out of fear of God, not men (2 Chron. 19:9). God holds us accountable for the authority we exercise.

Jehoshaphat appointed priests and Levites to help in administering civil laws. Many years earlier, Moses had chosen men who were capable, faithful, and honest to help him judge disputes among the people (Exodus 18:21-22).

Obviously the best kind of leader is one who always acts with reverence for God. Effective leaders get the job done; faithful leaders make sure the job is done in God's way with God's timing.

They are careful to instill God's wisdom in future leaders and build God's values into the entire community.

### **All who sin will face calamity**

Romans 2:9

There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on sinning—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile.

Although God does not usually punish us immediately for sin, his eventual judgment is certain.

We don't know exactly when it will happen, but we know that no one will escape that final encounter with the Creator. For more on judgment, see John 12:48 and Rev. 20:11-15.

## **Wrong doings receive pay back**

Colossians 3:25

But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. God has no favorites who can get away with evil.

Paul does not condemn or condone slavery, but explains that Christ transcends all divisions between people.

Slaves are told to work hard as though their master were Christ himself (Col. 3:22-25); but masters should be just and fair (Col. 4:1).

Perhaps Paul was thinking specifically of Onesimus and Philemon—the slave and master whose conflict lay behind the letter to Philemon (see the book of Philemon). Philemon was a slave owner in the Colossian church, and Onesimus had been his slave (Col. 4:9).

Since the creation, God has given us work to do. If we could regard our work as an act of worship or service to God, such an attitude would take some of the drudgery and boredom out of it.

We could work without complaining or resentment if we would treat our job problems as the cost of discipleship.

## **Judged according to what you do**

1 Peter 1:17

And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites when he judges. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time as foreigners here on earth.

“Reverent fear” is not the fear of a slave for a ruthless master, but the healthy respect of a believer for the all-powerful God. Because God is the Judge of all the earth, we dare not ignore him or treat him casually.

We should not assume that our privileged status as God’s children gives us freedom to do whatever we want. We should not be spoiled children, but grateful children who love to show respect for our heavenly Father.

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