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# Shunning Favouritism: An Exegetical Examination of James 2: 1-13 and Its Challenges in Africa

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**Abstract:** This paper is an exegetical examination of shunning favouritism in James 2:1-13 and its challenges in Africa. It underscores the negative behaviours or practices that hinder love and harmonious relationship expected to characterize smooth operations in the Christian community, the church as the Body of Christ. Accordingly, the paper highlights some of the major characteristic features of the church by assessing the opinions of some biblical scholars on the subject matter. As the Bible is replete with instances the issue at hand, the paper pointedly and exegetically studies the text of James 2:1-13, while the challenges in Africa were drawn. To this end, some practical recommendations were made, namely, undue respect of persons is sinful because through such practice, unconsciously, with evil thoughts, we become judges of other people, especially as we discriminate among persons based on their perceived status through factors such as social, economic, and political influence; since all men are endowed with great potentials, though, differently gifted/talented, the society may need to acknowledge and respect the contributions of some individuals to her growth and development. However, such honour or appreciation should never be done to the exclusion of those whose contributions are not too visible in order to overcome prejudice. The Church should strive towards striking a balance between loving all people equally, and preventing evil practices/ungodliness in the society. The need to respect the dignity and image of God in all persons should not be seen as license for encouraging or extolling immorality.

**Keywords:** Shunning, Favouritism, Partiality, Church, Africa

## 1. Introduction

In a multi-ethnic or multi-cultural African environment, the practice or attitude of favouritism or partiality resurfaces its ugly head *via intra* and *extra* personal relations of individuals or groups. Yet, by the unique nature of the Church as a spiritually vibrant human organizations, with the goal of protecting members from physical and spiritual interests, as well as serving as the “salt and light of the world,” she should be a beacon of hope to address these anomalies. The word “church” is derived from a translation of the Greek word *Ekklesia* which a reference to “the called out ones.” Hence, the Church is not just a building and an organization, but also a people, precious people, a special people who see themselves as standing in relation to the God who saves them and to each other as those who share in this salvation. That accounts why the use of *Ekklesia* in the New Testament provides an important link between the Church of Jesus Christ and the Old Testament nation of Israel [1].

The Church was founded by Jesus Christ as a spiritual community of the redeemed sinners turned saints. In the Septuagint, it was the word most frequently chosen to translate the Hebrew “*qahal*” which meant both summon to an assembly and the act of assembling [2]. Nonetheless, “*qahal*” had gradually assumed a religious significance as the Israelites came to understand themselves as a people who been assembled by God. The

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early Christians also used the term “*Ekklesia*” to designate themselves [3]. The idea of assembly is also expressed by the Greek word, “*koinonia*,” another word used to describe the early Christian congregation [3]. “*Koinonia*” means a “common share” or “to participate in.” Paul’s use of the word suggests that Christians actually participate in or share in the life of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1: 9). Membership is composed of all who professed faith and allegiance in Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and Lord. They are expected to be treated equally in order for them to maintain harmonious inter-personal relationship with fellow believers through active participation in church activities such as Sunday liturgy, fellowship, prayer meetings, Bible study, to mention but a few. Regrettably, in some instances, members are being treated based on their achieved social status, family background, gender differences, etc. That experience is not new, but has always been with the Church of all ages, thereby jeopardizing the goal of her existence [4].

The text of the Bible plays both prophetic and critical roles to achieving this freedom from unwholesome practices such as partiality and favouritism that have been affecting the overall relevance of the Church to the society. These attitudes have tendencies to distort mutual love and harmony that should exist in the Church and community as large [5]. The Church in Africa needs to amend so that through unwavering efforts and determination, she will correct these ills. Accordingly, this paper suggests ways to correct such anomalies, through enhancing the virtues and challenges in Africa. To achieve this objective, the paper discusses the nature and functions of the Church through the provision of the exegetical study of Epistle of James 2:1-13, thereby drawing some inferences as challenges in the African context. Before then, let us understand the key words of this paper, namely, shunning and favouritism [1], [6].

#### **Delineating Shunning and Favouritism**

The word “shunning” means escape, evade, in order to get away or keep away from something. It implies a slippery or baffling quality in the person or things that escapes. It suggests intentionally avoiding a thing or person. The *Encarta Dictionary of English Language* defines shunning as “to deliberately or intentionally avoiding somebody or something.” Accordingly, the word is used as a reference to the expected kingdom lifestyle to be cultivated by all regenerated Christians in their treatment of persons. This is expected to become their cultured habits in order to successfully fulfil the mandate of Jesus Christ, which is based on loving all persons irrespective of their social status, economic backgrounds or other achievements [7], [8].

Whereas favouritism is the practice of giving unfair preferential treatment to one person or group at the expense of another. It suggests the practice of giving special treatment or unfair advantages to a person or group. Contextually, shunning is used to mean the age-old practice of judging or relating with persons or groups in the Christian assembly, based on perceived social status [9], [10].

#### **The Church as a Unique Social Organization**

The Church, as a spiritual organization, is the assembly of redeemed sinners turned saints, with members having faith in God and the atoning/sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ [10], [11]. Unlike other human organizations, the Church is both universal and local. According to Millard Erikson, the word “Church is a reference to assembly of the redeemed at both local and universal levels. Beyond the reference to churches in specific cities, there are also references to Church meetings and in individual homes. The church is not a sum or composite of individual local groups. Instead, the whole is found in each place. After all, the Church is made present in each place and time by the local Church [10]. We can never over-emphasize the fact that in reference to the local Church do not say the Church *of*, but the Church *in*. This is because it is the one Church that finds realization in the different localities. That means that even in the process of shunning favouritism the local Church must remain united to the universal Church of

which it is a part. Thus, the concept that Church is universal in nature enables us to more pointedly understand certain New Testament passages such as Matt 16: 18; Eph 1: 22-23.

Various understandings of biblical scholars differ on the marks of the Church. For MacNair and Meek, the Church is the physical presence of Jesus Christ on earth. The Church exists to lead men on earth in praising and worshipping God. While each assembly shares the same purpose of demonstrating Christ's presence on earth, the fact that each church resides in a particular place-geographically, culturally and historically – means that demonstrating Christ's presence will necessarily vary from church to church [3].

Like every serious organization, it is characterised by marks. Erickson submitted that the "marks" refer to the images of the church, with qualities of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. He listed those biblical images of the church to be: 1) The people of God - emphasizes God's initiative in choosing them; 2) The body of Christ – emphasizes that the Church is the *locus* of Christ's activities now, just as was his physical body during his earthly ministry. The image also emphasizes the connection of the church as a group of believers with Christ. Christ is the head of the body (Col 1: 18), of which believers are individual members or part; 3) The Temple of the Holy Spirit – the church is now indwelt by the Spirit, both individually and collectively (1 Cor 3: 16-17, 19). Dwelling within the Church, the Holy Spirit imparts his life to it with nature such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Furthermore, to demonstrate the presence of Jesus Christ on earth, the church has some functions to perform. The functions of the church are clearly related to her purpose. According to Rick Warren, the five (5) purposes of the church are: 1) Worship – encouraging members to acknowledge the sovereignty of God through Jesus Christ in all areas of their endeavours as well as through responsible services to God and humanity; 2) Ministry – demonstration of God's love to others by meeting their needs and healing hurts in the name of Jesus; 3) Evangelization – communicating God's Word to the world. Broadly, evangelization means all missionary action, having conversion to Christianity as a goal. In a more restricted sense, the second phase of missionary catechesis is that stage whereby the basic Christian message is presented to the prospective Christian. This message or *kerygma* embraces the Christian doctrine of God's love for man, revelation, sin and especially, salvation through Christ. This stage of evangelization does not engage in apologetical arguments, but seeks to relate the person of Christ to the concrete, existential needs of the unbeliever. Thus, a basic principle of this *kerygmatic* approach is to keep Christians constantly in the Gospel message and the key to any further elaboration of Christian Doctrine. At this stage, the individual responds by his/her initial act of faith, accepting Christ and the invitation to share in the riches of divine adoption; 4) Teaching/disciples – believers are called to reach out to people, but also to teach them to obey all the commands of Jesus. Through this, the believers carry out Christ's injunction to His disciples to proclaim the Good News and teach all nations; Fellowship – identification with the body of Christ. Fellowship is the coming together of a people, in this case, God's people. Christians are called not only to belong, but also to believe.

The Church as the assembly of the people of God is a universal reality. It transcends geographical, cultural and social boundaries, gathering people from all nations into one community. Hence, the Church as the People of God which is not limited to a specific people or culture but is universal, is sent to all people with the Gospel of Christ. This universality means that the Church is an assembly that includes all who respond to God's call, regardless of race, nationality, or background. The people of God, therefore, are united not by external factors but by their shared faith in Christ and their commitment to living as His disciples. The Church's assembly is a sign of God's kingdom, which is open to all humanity, inviting everyone to partake in the grace and salvation offered through Christ.

Today, all over the world, the Church is faced with challenges of lack of proper understanding of her unique status and roles in the world. The situation has been

responsible for the experiences of misrepresentation, thereby leading to experiences of unhealthy struggle for relevance in the contemporary society. Again, today many Christians want a Christianity without a cross. Cross which is the symbol of Christian worship is conspicuously lacking in many Churches. Some do not want to hear anything about the cross and suffering. They are not just afraid of misfortunes, but also of sufferings, incurable or protracted sickness, lack of means to survive in the world, irreparable loss of human rights, shelter and problems of insecurity, lack of desired progress, lack of peace, frustration and despair, tension arising from negative relationship with God. In the end they sometimes lose sight of the narrow passage that leads to greater height. Some Catholic pastors who are into "Healing Ministry" are grossly guilty of telling people who come to them to hear what they want because of the pittance of "sowing of seed" (money) they would ask them to give. In most Harvest Thanksgiving at churches, the prosperity preachers (priests) are the ones invited to animate the congregation because they have the magic wand to raise funds, not without bargaining the percentage they would be paid. The prosperity gospel is promoted when some African pastors claim to pray for "miracle money" into different bank accounts by shouts of "I claim it", "I believe it", "In Jesus name", "I receive it in the mighty name of Jesus", "I want to hear a bigger amen", "Give Jesus a wiper", "Your miracle is on the way; claim it", "It is my portion", "Amen", to mention but a few. These trends are also manifested when instead of rushing a sick hospital to prevent him/her from dying in order to receive the correct medication, the person is taken instead to the "powerful man/woman of God to pray for miraculous healing".

The current socio-religious discourse with regard to insecurity, terror and the culture of violence in Africa and beyond creates an avalanche of opportunities for the Church in Africa to witness Christ. Accordingly, all forms of neglect, disrespect and partiality are morally unjust. Generally, every human being is created in the image of God. Therefore, the victims who are unlawfully treated or denied of their basic human rights are not inferior human beings. They are entitled to be treated without any molest or ridicule, but with respect. The members of the Christian assembly should be communicated this truth during the homily/sermon or Christian formation. Pastoral care should be extended to any relationship that hampers mutual love and harmony among members in the church and society at large because it is a charitable work which every Christian is invited and challenged to do always to "least of the brethren" [3]. They will help in the personal growth and exercise of discipline among the churches. In the next section, the paper presents the exegetical study of James 2: 1-13.

### **Presentation of the Text of James 2: 1-13**

The focus here is the exegetical examination of the background text of James 2: 1-13 from the Good News Bible with the Deuterocanonical Books:

1. My brothers and sisters, as believers in our Lord Jesus, the Lord of glory, you must never treat people in different ways according to their outward appearance.
2. Suppose a rich man wearing a gold ring and fine clothes comes to your meeting, and a poor man in ragged clothes also comes.
3. If you show more respect to the well-dressed man and say to him, "Have this seat here," but say to the poor man, "Stand over there, or sit here on the floor by my feet,"
4. Then you are guilty of creating distinctions among yourselves and of making judgements based on evil motives.
5. Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! God chose the poor people of this world to be rich in faith and to possess the kingdom which he promised to those who love him.
6. But you dishonour the poor! Who are the ones who oppress you and drag you before the judges? The rich!
7. They are the ones who speak evil of that good name which has been given to you.
8. You will be doing the right thing if you obey the law of the Kingdom, which is found in the scripture, "love your neighbour as you love yourself."

9. But if you treat people according to their outward appearance, you are guilty of sin, and the Law condemns you as a lawbreaker.
10. Whoever breaks one commandment is guilty of breaking them all.
11. For the same one who said, "Do not commit adultery, " also said, "Do not commit murder." Even if you do not commit adultery, you have become a lawbreaker if you commit murder.
12. Speak and act as people who will be judged by the law that sets us free.
13. For God will not show mercy when he judges the person who has not been merciful: but mercy triumphs over judgement.

### **Exegetical Examination of James 2: 1-13**

The Letter of James is a classic literary work. It has been described as a masterpiece. It is a practical document of high repute, written to meet some personal and collective needs of Christians in the Early Church. According to Zane Hodges, the Letter is a beautifully constructed Christian epistle, written by an author with a pastor's heart. The writer is a skilled communicator, whose style is both terse and graphic, by employing a wide range of effective illustrations, thereby making it to believe that he also taught God's truth orally, with considerate power.

Although, the Epistle of James may have been written long before any other NT book, it is probably, came into general circulation much later. Indeed, it was a pastoral communication from James to the scattered congregations in Palestine as it had a single destination. Such assertion was responsible for classifying the book as one of the "general epistles." Nonetheless, the question of its authorship had remained in contention for ages. James Adamson, citing Scott, submitted that there is no writing in the New Testament on which critical opinion has varied so widely as on the Epistle of James. Though, a few books pose so many questions, but this strangely mixed Jewish Christian good Greek/Semitized Greek work is truly a "riddle," perhaps, the biggest among the NT books, from which a host of riddle spring [12], [13].

The Epistle of James has attracted series of debates, especially in relation to its authorship and date. Pedrito Maynard-Reid submitted that the questions of: who wrote the document, and, when it was written, are clearly intertwined. There are basically two conjectures: one is the traditional position, which argues for an early date with the authorship as by James the brother of Jesus; the other position argues for a late date and pseudonymous authorship (Maynard-Reid, 1987, p. 6).

Some Fathers of the Church commented on this regard. V. G. Tasker submitted that from the evidence of Eusebius and Jerome, there were some in the Early Church who regarded the Epistle of James as pseudepigraphic [11]. This view has also commended itself to those modern scholars who on general considerations assigned it a late date, and who regarded it as a moral treatise rather than a letter. Accordingly, Tasker cited Martin Dibelius writes that: "it is comprehensible that a Christian at the end of first century who wished to impress a practical Christianity upon the Church would choose James as his patron since he was called "the righteous." However, the tradition that became established in the Church that the Epistle was not only apostolic but should be attributed to James, the head of the Early Church at Jerusalem, no doubt, ought to be accepted as authentic. Clearly, the Epistle has seldom being regarded as the work of one of the original twelve apostles affords it some negative support.

Two arguments used for dating the Epistle between AD 50 and James' death abound. The first makes much of the justification of the passage in James 2: 14-25. The argument was based on the fact of similarities in the passage with the phrase used by Paul on the theme of faith and work. Accordingly, Maynard, James must have been attempting to correct a misuse and misunderstanding of Pauline doctrine. The second argument is one from silence, which contends that the paucity of distinctive Christian teaching in James' Epistle is due to the fact that they are presupposed and therefore, implies a settled



theological condition. A basic reason for supporting the proposition that the Epistle was written around AD 50 is based on the position that the Epistle presupposes the social position of the primitive Palestinian community, particularly, Jerusalem, prior to the Apostolic Council [8].

In supporting the traditional view about authorship and date of writing the Epistle, Hodges argued that the notion that Epistle of James is a non-Christian Jewish document into which some Christian additions have been inserted is now properly regarded as a fiction. He emphasized that it is true that James makes no reference to the Gentiles, nor does he show any awareness to the kind of evangelization typical of the Pauline mission. This suggests a possibility that James was written at a date prior to the Gentile outreach recorded in the Book of Acts. For Hodges, it is possible that the letter was written, even prior to the evangelization of Samaria. However, since the Samaritans had a racial relationship with the Jews, the early Christians could have viewed the Samaritan converts as returning to the spiritual community of the twelve tribes who constituted the true Israel of that day [5].

With regard to the purpose of the Epistle, Hodges argued that the structure of James' letter allows us to define its purpose on the threefold admonition of Jam 1: 19: "let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. James was writing to the Christians who had been scattered by the persecution that arose after the death of Stephen. The persecution must have subsided with the conversion of Saul, and enough time must have passed for new difficulties to appear, causing various kinds of intra-church problems. Hence, James' letter is an effort to encourage these believers to face trials with faith and perseverance (5: 7-8); and he also seeks to renew a spirit of peace within the churches (5: 9) .

The practice of prejudice, partiality or favouritism has been with mankind for ages. All human beings can be adjudged prone to, or guilty of treating persons with a sense of bias, based on factors which are usually hinged on their achieved or perceived status. However, Christians are expected to act and relate differently, especially, when it comes to treatment of persons in the Christian assemblies. Accordingly, commenting on chapter two verses 1-7, Clayton Harrop submitted that there are many ways in which our faith may be made meaningless so far as our relation with others is concerned, and one of these is about respect of persons or showing partiality. This particular sin involves every one because there are many aspects of it and it is contrary to faith. The example which James used is one where we are often blind and do not see our own guilt. James made the point that showing partiality is contrary to faith in Jesus Christ, by indicating that Jesus was the full manifestation of the presence of God. Hence, showing partiality in the treatment of persons is against the desires of God (1989, p. 52-54).

Additionally, showing partiality is contrary to God's approval of men/women because the judgement of God does not always agree with those of men/women. Human beings look at the wrong aspects of life when making evaluations, believing that a person is rich because he/she has money in the bank, or large amount of property, but no one can actually measure the wealth of a fine family. Harrop further stated that in the passage, James calls our attention to the items of intangible riches. The poor have been made rich in faith, and this wealth is more enduring than money because faith endures to eternity, but worldly things have only temporary worth. Furthermore, the poor of this world become heirs of the kingdom of God (Harrop, 1989, p. 54).

Meanwhile, in verses 2-3, Tasker submitted that here James gives a specific illustration of the kind of ways in which respect of persons might express itself. Two non-Christian visitors might enter the Christian assembly, more literally, 'a synagogue' – the word denoting the place of assembly or the company of the assembled. One might be wearing a gold ring and goodly apparel (fine clothing or being smartly dressed); the other might be a beggar in vile raiment or shabby clothing. Both ought to be welcomed as equals

in the assembly where all are equal in the sight of God. Nonetheless, there would always be a temptation for those who have not fully thrown off the false values of their pre-converted life by treating the two visitors differently.

He is not alone in this submission. Maynard-Reid argued that James connects verse 1 with the next by  $\gamma\alpha\rho$  ("for") in an effort to illustrate the problems of partiality, and in verse 2, we find a problem. The author uses  $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$  (if") with the aorist subjunctive, and thus, creates a third class condition in the subjunctive mood. Accordingly, the question arises whether he intends the illustration of verse 2-4 to be hypothetical, or whether he is relating an actual incident. However, opinions of scholars are divided upon whether the illustration was actual or hypothetical. But it would seem that the most ideal key toward understanding the situation of this illustration might lie in the use of the word *synagogue*.

On this note of verse 4, Tasker opined that the passage calls attention to two fundamental wrongs: first, it shows a divided allegiance, a hypocritical desire to serve God and mammon: a double-mindedness that was earlier condemned in James 1:7 and 8. Second, those who differentiate between the rich and poor in this way show themselves to be judges with vitiated motives. This is because they were judging others with evil thoughts. Tasker maintains that offence of the wealthy oppressor is their task of reverence and respect for the dignity of fellow human beings. Accordingly, he argued that the supreme offence of the wealthy is their sense of false security which makes them to disrespect fellow human being, thereby blaspheming the worthy name of God.

As believing brothers and sisters in the family of God, Christians professing faith in Christ as Saviour, and anticipating life in the glory, are not to be found guilty of the sin of snobbery. Hence, commenting on verse 4-5, Downey argued that James paints a picture of a proud person, with his head high on the air, strutting into the synagogue, dressed in splendid suit with costly jewellery adorning his person. Unfortunately, some Christians today are in rat race to show off. They assign the rich and influential on the church and mission boards, not because of their spiritual fitness, but because of their social standing. People are often judged by their outward appearance, but pay little attention to their intrinsic worth. A man's clothing might not be an index of his true character. An adage says: "the man makes clothes; clothes do not make the man." Therefore, God is concerned more about our character. When the character is right, the outward appearance will adjust accordingly.

#### **Literature review**

In the Epistle, James uses a combination of literary style to drive home his points, especially rhetoric. One of his goals was to reveal the evils of partiality, prejudice or favouritism in the Christian assembly. On this point, Kurt Richardson submitted that, here, James indicated what was wrong about the world: wealth and its system of honour because to show favouritism is to commit sin. Sin is seen as an activity that offends God, the Lawgiver; but favouritism is a sin that transgresses the royal law. Law-breakers are those who are under obligations to keep God's law but failed to do so. In verse 11, two extreme examples of breaking God's law are brought forward as adultery and murder [14].

One can rightly attest that the Epistle of James is a reminder of the law of divine retribution that all men will be judged by God according to how they have treated others. For Barclay, with specific reference to verse 12-13, James comes to the end of this section to remind his readers of two great facts of the Christian life, namely, the Christian lives under the law of liberty, and it is by the law of liberty that he will be judged; and the Christian must always remember that only he shows mercy will find mercy. Next attention will focus on the contextualisation of the exegetical analysis of James 2: 1-13 through studying the challenges facing the Church in Africa.

## 2. Materials and Methods

An exegetical and analytical methodology guides this research to study James 2:1-13 through its relevance for dealing with favouritism in African church communities. The research performs scriptural textual analysis of James while applying biblical hermeneutics to reveal spiritual lessons about prejudice as seen in the text. A text-based exegetical analysis served as the method for understanding the text after analyzing its cultural linguistic and historical background for accurate interpretation of the author's original meaning. The research utilizes secondary material from theological commentaries alongside scholarly articles and doctrinal teachings to establish its position relative to Christian doctrinal thought.

This research examines how favoritism appears inside present-day African church structures through thematic data analysis strategies. The research evaluates tribalism as well as socio-economic inequalities and leadership prejudices that shape religious group dynamics through an analytical literature assessment. This research introduces both historical and doctrinal viewpoints to determine how Christian traditions handled discrimination during biblical times and in contemporary church structures. This methodology enables researchers to interpret results within context of African social religion which leads to a deeper comprehension of biblical practice implementation. This research merges scriptural interpretation with application of cultural factors to create a complete method for fighting favoritism within contemporary Christian congregations while showing how biblical lessons drive positive religious inclusion.

## 3. Results

An exegetical analysis of James 2:1-13 discovers theological aspects together with cultural influences regarding favoritism in Christian faith which affect today's Church especially in Africa. The research demonstrates that favoritism receives spiritual disapproval from Christianity because it embodies essential theological doctrine which upholds divine justice and defends human dignity while addressing salvation for all people. The main notion of this theological passage is the belief that God made humans in his image which grants them equal dignity and value. This text fights against human inclinations to judge people through material wealth assessments or social status evaluation or outward appearance standards because divine love shows no partiality.

A theological analysis demonstrates that James' warning about showing preference corresponds with the religious teachings about realizing justice through impartiality. The message shows that discrimination which exists in Christian congregations faces direct opposition to faith principles and fights against Christ's constant embrace of society's outcasts and his rejection of social rank systems. The hermeneutical interpretation of James 2:1-13 challenges readers to bridge historical cultural contexts when studying the text. The passage God intended for early Christian followers dealing with social and economic differences strongly applies to our present society marked by institutional discrimination and social inequalities in religious settings. It becomes necessary to develop theological methods that adapt biblical messages to present-day circumstances to make their application possible.

Research shows that religious institutions need to create systematic changes that destroy favoritism systems operating within leadership appointments and resource distribution programs and community service initiatives. James uses his message to motivate religious communities for internal assessment while promoting both spiritual worth recognition and social extension beyond monetary and networking opportunities. The African religious environment showing frequent tribal and economic and related leadership biases requires this biblical verse because it establishes important ethical standards for change. The Church in Africa can achieve transformative status to advocate



for equity and empower marginalized communities when it practices true religious solidarity following James 2:1-13.

This study provides in-depth exegetical discoveries yet it generates several investigatory directions that need further study. Comparative analysis between biblical texts of favouritism within the Pauline epistles would establish explanations regarding early Christian leaders' methods of handling socio-economic differences. The sociological examination of favoritism practices at religious levels would help identify comprehensive effects on church development and spiritual wellbeing and community harmony. Other religious perspectives enrich the dialogue through their analyses of partiality because these perspectives demonstrate useful models to achieve diverse relationships within religious communities. The development of practical structures by faith-based organizations will establish transparency in their leadership structures to solve current partiality problems within contemporary Christian communities.

Social justice teaching and ethical leadership studies in the Church rely on James 2:1-13 as their key scriptural basis according to this research study. Theological requirements for Christian discipleship demand the practice of non-discriminatory behavior because it represents essential biblical moral behavior. The African Church faces the task of implementing biblical principles into practical ministry programs in order to establish Christ-like communities rooted in justice and unity. The Church needs purposeful work to maintain basic teachings so it can shine as its divine mission in the world that grows ever more divided.

#### 4. Discussion

##### Challenges Facing the Church in Africa

The Bible is replete with instances favouritism was absolutely condemned, especially using the text of James 2: 1-13, as a case study. And it has formed the backbone of some doctrinal pronouncements of such churches. For example, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, drawing inspirations from the scriptures and tradition, emphasizes the equality of man and woman in their dignity as creatures for each other (Gen 2:18, 23) and created in the image and likeness of God (CCC no. 371). Undue respect of persons is sinful because through practice, unconsciously, with evil thoughts, we become judges of other people, especially as we discriminate among persons based on their perceived status through factors such as social, economic and political life. It does not show sign of maturity when we are relating with people based on their outward appearances and not according to what a man truly is. The truth is that wealth can become a snare against genuine spirituality, and the Church should be the vanguard for promotion of egalitarian society, where both the rich and the poor receive equal opportunities by having equal life chances to grow in Christian life and spirituality.

Contextually, the church as light and salt of the world is obliged to take a prophetic lead to uphold the dignity of women and children against obnoxious cultural practices that affect their socio-economic development in the society. If one is better placed today, he/she must not close ones eyes to the suffering neighbours who need attention. The theology of presence calls for availability as a form of witnessing to the gospel. And this makes this command relevant in this age of globalisation as well as being urgently needed in the world of today where this love transcends localities, colours, races and national interest. The Gospel itself is a tool for shunning favouritism. This is what Jesus represented in his ministry while on earth and still does through his Mystical Body, the Church.

Like the days of James, the Church in Africa is experiencing the challenge of maintaining her ideals and virtues especially, where show of partiality is the order of the day. In most cases, people are treated with respect based on their perceived status. To the writer's mind, what has not been sufficiently forthcoming from the pulpits and church educative instruments is an open denouncement of the dangers of prejudice. Pope Francis,

some years back in his Easter Message, decries the "globalisation of indifference" that leaves the world community insensitive, tearless, oppressive, and wounded when confronted by human marginalization, anguish and globalised social evils. He writes: "We have become used to the suffering of others. It doesn't interest us. It's not our business. We are a society that has forgotten how to cry" (2013, no. 7). International charters, communiqués and declarations on justice, peace and human rights are many, but their implementations has little or no impact in developing countries. Situations in Somalia, DR Congo, Mali, Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria, Chad, Cameroun and Niger, speak volumes of lack of authentic love in action. Everybody should be involved in advocating for loving and warning against the dangers of favouritism. The Church must avoid enslaving herself by exalting politicians. After all, the Church is the guardian of the conscience of the people. She must strive towards striking a balance between loving all people equally and promoting godliness on the need to respect the dignity and image of God in all persons.

The church is a healing community to a world broken down by abusive inhuman cultures and favouritism. As a community called to liberate the oppressed, it is required to free men and women from a culture of violence that perpetuates discrimination. Pope Paul VI also stressed the development of people as a way to show this love of neighbour in the Encyclical Letter, *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of People). He says: "of those who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance; of those who are seeking a larger share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are consciously striving for fuller growth". The same Pope also stresses in *A Call to Action*: "The time has come to pass from economics to politics. To take politics seriously...is to affirm the duty of man, of every man, to recognize the concrete reality and the value of freedom of choice that is offered him to seek about the good...of the nation of mankind" [15]. With these documents and more, we can rightly say that the Church has said and is still speaking on the issue of social justice since, according to John XXIII, it is a principle that "all classes of citizens benefit equitably from an increase in national wealth" [15]. This is a strict fruit of justice bordering on the dangers of favouritism. The Gospel values have the final say in purifying and regenerating their revival to the standard of human values and dignity that promote equity and justice. The approach is not to deal with victims in isolation, and prejudice but Africans needs to analyse what motivates them to be engaged in tribalism and favouritism.

## 5. Conclusion

The humble submission of this paper is to denounce the practice of showing partiality or favouritism to persons on the basis of their perceived social status in the society. The practice is an age-old tradition which has been with humankind for ages. This article unravels that through this practice, undue attention is being given to the rich or wealthy in the society, leading to discrimination among persons who are all created in the image of God. With the lenses of our exegetical study of the Letter of James 2:1-13, it is affirmed that such a practice is a sin and offense against God, which must be discouraged in Africa and beyond. This paper does not claim to be an exhaustive one, rather, an introductory musing on the Epistle of James' heritage. It challenges Africa, especially her leaders, with the task of shunning favouritism in order to build the human development. Inasmuch as certain practices inimical to recognition of human potentials are not challenged, the socio-economic emancipation will continue to suffer setback. Theologically, the contemporary Africa society should change its discriminatory and oppressive attitude hampering mutual love and harmony among members in the church and the society at large. The danger of prejudice is cankerworm that must be fought to reclaim Christianity as a religion where members are the "salt and light of the world."

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