

Promote Family and Friends, or the Right Person for this Role? – Elisama Daniel

One day I met a friend at the gate of a certain organisation based in Khartoum. After greeting him, I congratulated him saying “mabruk” or congratulations! “You now work in this office?” His reply was: “How can I work here since I am not from a certain tribe?” He named the tribe of the executive director and the majority of staff of the organisation. My friend was stating what everybody knew. What really took place when workers were hired was that the head of that institution recruited most of the staff from his own tribe, with only a few added friends from elsewhere.

Somebody said this about many institutions in the Sudan: that she can walk into an institution and greet the staff in the mother tongue of the head of that institution, knowing everybody will respond with replies in that language! She may say: “Cibaak?” Ashingrach is the response; “Maale?” Maale magwa; “Gini pae?” Pae te; “Madang ta?” A lo’but, etc. It has been rumoured that the even in certain government offices which serve our country, jobs are only available to men and women from the leading minister’s own tribe. The moment a new minister from a different ethnic group comes to lead the department tribal dominance will definitely change.

The above illustrations may well be exaggerations, but they demonstrate the common abuse of tribal or family relations for private gain.

In the beginning of the Bible people were all of one tribe speaking only a single language. Having one language is good; people understand each other and can communicate and work together efficiently. However, when these people wanted to build a tower reaching up to God, to proudly make a great name for themselves, God opposed them. He immediately scattered them into different tribes and speaking different languages, Genesis 11:1-9.¹ We learn from this that when the motives behind being one single tribe are selfishness and pride, and the resultant actions are for tribal benefit and not for the glory of Creator God, then they become an abuse of a God-given distinctiveness. Today the words tribalism (abuse of tribe) or nepotism (abuse of relations), are usually associated with misuse, bad use or abuse of some

¹ Genesis 4:26 compared to Genesis 11:4 shows how people substituted the worship of God, “began to call on the name of the Lord”, for proud selfishness, “we may make a name for ourselves”.

things which are clearly given by God to be correctly used for everyone's benefit (tribal culture and family responsibility).²

Unfortunately this happens in our everyday situation in the Sudan, in both the Christian church as well as secular institutions. There have always been accusations that if you do not have a "back", or "dahr" in Arabic, you may not be employed, or promoted if employed, or offered a scholarship, or you may be discriminated against in relief distributions.

In 2 Kings 12: 1-18 Joash, king of Judah, sought honest people to fundraise in his efforts to repair the temple of the Lord. Choosing the right people in the right places with appropriate skills to do the work proved effective. Work was done and there was no need to give a report because the people were honest, verse 15. Therefore I suggest tribalism and nepotism can be eliminated today by practising honesty, setting in place all the right procedures and guidelines, then openly following them.³

This was the case when the seven deacons were to be appointed in Jerusalem. "Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the (Holy) Spirit and wisdom", Acts 6:3. The daily responsibility for food distribution, which needed to be seen to be fair, was entrusted to such people who would serve without racial discrimination. Christians from Jewish backgrounds worked together with Christians from Greek backgrounds to transparently deal with the complaints.⁴ If "all the disciples", verse 2, had not taken action to deal with the problem as soon as it arose, we can only imagine what may have developed.

In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul advised Timothy to pass on what he had learnt from him in the presence of many witnesses. Timothy was to give the developing work to faithful others, who would in turn do likewise. "Entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others". Someone who is faithful will continue loyally in spite of difficulties. Someone who is reliable is able to be

² Since "use" means "the act of doing something with something to achieve a proper result", and "abuse" means "to use something in a bad, dishonest or harmful way", it will be seen that both the motives and the end results must be considered in order to determine if it is use or abuse.

³ Joash's procedures included recording income, expenditure, work performance evaluation, and character reference.

⁴ Acts 6:1-7.

trusted completely. The most faithful and reliable person may not be from your tribe, but he or she is the right person for your job!

So selecting the right person for the right place doing the right service should never be linked with any tribal or kin lineage. Rather it must be decided on what is the best for all of God's people. Remember, all tribes, languages, nations and races are beautiful and have been purchased by the blood of the Lamb into a kingdom of priests to serve our God, Revelation 5:9-10. We must not reject people our Lord Jesus has died for!

Jesus challenged His followers on nepotism when His own mother and brothers requested Him to attend to them. Jesus questioned His disciples' understanding of "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" He pointed out that the Christian family is much bigger than any merely human family. "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother", Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21. We must never put family loyalty where our Christian commitment should be.

Jesus' own words also included "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me", Matthew 10:37-38.⁵ Sometimes we will face difficult choices in following Christ. It is at these moments that the quality of our discipleship is tested. "Only when one is willing to sacrifice one's life and relationship to one's family for the sake of Jesus does one begin to live".⁶

Nepotism, tribalism and any other kind of favouritism, give Christians in Sudan tough discipleship choices.

Discussion guide

Using this chapter and Scriptures quoted:

1. What did God dislike about the people speaking one common language in Genesis 11:1-9?

What did the Lord do that the people did not want? (compare verses 4 and 9).

⁵ Matthew 10:32-39; Luke 12:49-53.

⁶ David Turner, [The Gospel of Matthew](#) Cornerstone Bible Commentary (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale) p.157.

Why do you think people prefer to be in one place with their own kind?

2. Is it true or false to say that something God-given can be misused?

What happens to God's gift as a result?

How do people today "abuse a God-given distinctiveness" within Sudan?

Share personal experiences and examples of this.

3. "They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty", 2 Kings 12:15.

Suggest ways that honesty in all dealings *can be seen and known* to be done.

Consider 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:18-24; Ephesians 6:5-9; Acts 6:1-7.

4. "The most faithful and reliable person may not be from your tribe, but he or she is the right person for your job!"

What challenges would you face in putting this kind of appointment into practice?

How could you face up to them?

5. In what practical ways can you apply 1 Peter 2:15-17 to your circumstances?

What is the correct balance between "show proper respect to everyone" and "love the brotherhood of believers"?

If you had to favour one group which one would it be? Why?

6. Explain how Jesus' words in Matthew 12:46-50 and Matthew 10:37-39, about His own family, challenge every Christian ...

... about our own family relationships

... *and* about our relationships within the wider Christian family.