

Spiritual Nepotism

by Dan S. Shipley

While the term “**nepotism**” is generally associated with the political realm, its meaning renders it adaptable to usage in other areas as well. Originally, the term was used to describe the favoritism shown to nephews by medieval prelates. Later, however, nepotism came to be seen as favoritism shown to any relative, and usually in disregard of merit, ethics, or even law itself. *In short, it is the practice of giving priority to relatives over right; favoring family to a fault.*

Thusly viewed, it is not difficult to see the term’s relevance and application to the spiritual realm. Accordingly then, what we might call a sort of “spiritual nepotism” may be described as the practice of favoring family above God. Isn’t that the sin of Eli the priest (1 Sam. 2)? God saw Eli’s indulgence of his wicked sons as a thing of iniquity, *“because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not”* (1 Sam. 3:13). Thus, Eli honored his sons above God, as God Himself says, 1 Samuel 2:29. Surely, God is no less concerned when modern “Elis” do the same. Any parent who is more concerned with his children’s **wants** than with God’s **will** makes himself the enemy of God, child and self, even if unwittingly. God shows us that children **need** restraining, discipline, and spiritual training (TEXT; Deut. 11:19; Prov. 22:6, 13:24, 23:13; Eph. 6:4). To withhold these things in favor of pleasing the child is to honor him above God — it is spiritual nepotism. But, we not only hurt our offspring in withholding the good, we do likewise in upholding the bad and the wrong in them. Had you ever noticed, for instance, how some schoolteachers have nothing more to do than pick on our children? Don’t we just **know** our dears wouldn’t do all those awful things they’ve been accused of? Confidence and trust are absolutely essential — except when they blind us to truth and cause us to defend our youth in wrongdoing. Such blind allegiance is a poor substitute for real love and usually hurts more than it helps. Faithfulness requires a consistent application of truth and right to all persons and all circumstances. No doubt Abraham could have offered God excuses a lot easier than he could offer his son Isaac — but, thankfully, faith triumphed over feelings in his case, as it must in ours. It is in anticipation of these very conflicts that Jesus says, *“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me”* (Matt. 10:37).

But furthermore, we must see this principle involved in the husband and wife relationship also. Think of the Christians who have allowed their marriages to divorce them from God!; who have allowed their union with an unbeliever to separate them from the Lord! It is nothing short of spiritual nepotism when wives put pleasing their husband above pleasing God (and vice versa). Peter’s admonition needs remembering: *“We must obey God rather than men,”* Acts 5:29. We are living in a time in which family loyalty is desperately needed. But, may God help us to see it and discharge it within the framework of true faith. We owe it to God and kin.

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