

Gender Equality

Riddle One

A father and son were driving when they were involved in a serious RTA. The father died and the son was badly injured. As he lay on the operating table in the hospital the consultant surgeon came over to start work and then stopped, saying, "I can't do this, that's my son".

How come?

Gender equality important because its absence restricts your potential to become all God created you to be. I want to demonstrate that:

1. The bible assumes and celebrates men and women as equal
2. If we work hard to confront stereotypes of inequality we'll all benefit enormously
3. Women and men have free rein to be who they are in this church

Galatians 3:26-28

26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptised by[a] one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 And so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

The problem

When we live in a country where equality between men and women is enshrined in the law of the land why:

- do women earn less than men
- more men than women commit suicide
- were there no women in the shortlist for SPOTY in 2011 when we had women world champions in Ironman Triathlon, 10 kilometre swimming, Taekwondo
- do men make up 95% of the prison population

- are men underperforming women at every level of education
- are we having this talk?

With women's careers being constrained and men taking their own lives and so many other examples of inequality between men and women – **we are by no means seeing God's awesome and diverse creation bearing fruit in our lives.**

The peak of the creation story is God's creation of men and women. When I read the bible I see a vision of men and women working together, side by side, to cultivate and create in God's gloriously colourful creation.

The beauty of God's creation is in its diversity. Whereas our tendency to squeeze men and women into two stereotypes of uniformity defined by sex reduces the opportunity for God's creation to flourish in all its amazing diversity.

We tend to exaggerate differences and then engage with stereotypes until it produces inequality.

There are differences between men and women but there are many more ways in which they are alike.

There are as many ways in which men are different from each other as they are different from women.

Our society is fixated upon imposing a stereo-typed uniformity by perpetuating the myths of difference.

Word magnets: early-age stereo-typing

"Compliment your National Literacy range with these favourite Boys words."
(punctuation).

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Magnetic-Girls-complement-National-Literacy/dp/B000CDL860>

"I would like to thank the makers of this product as I have been struggling with my daughter's vocabulary for months now. I have told her that words such as "climbing, swinging, running and (of course) football" are not for her but she won't listen. I have told her these are boys' words and I now have the boys and girls' sets of words on the fridge where she can see them every day to remind her what she should and shouldn't be saying. She often talks about what she will 'do' when she grows up and I am so tired of reminding her that she won't be 'doing' anything! She will simply 'be'. She will be pretty and kind and light and fluffy like a little sugary, fairy bunny. 'Money' is a boys' word because she won't be earning money, she will be spending it. Boys will be working on "helicopters, aeroplanes, tractors and lorries" to earn the money that she will be spending on "clothes, perfume, necklaces, lipstick, handbags, jewels, make-up and shoes". I mean, where would this consumerist, capitalist society be without clear gender stereotypes?"

Riddle about surgeon – the surgeon is the boy's mother.

All of us are bathed in this from an early age and it will take hard work to repair and rebuild our understanding of each other.

We must have space for men who can climb mountains and space for men who can throw up a small extension to their home in a weekend. We must also have space for men who can paint landscapes and cook cordon bleu meals. And we must have space for men who, like me, can do none of these things.

Genesis 2:23 has man looking in wonder at woman and commenting on how alike they are – not how different,

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”

The whole point was that out of all the incredible variety in creation no companion could be found for man, he was lonely. God said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” Genesis 2:18.

Exercise

Which of these behaviours would you say is typically masculine/feminine/equal:

1. Being a leader with authority
2. Being an advocate for small children
3. Making plans to have a party with friends
4. Crying in public
5. Taking action after getting angry
6. Caring for the sick
7. Teaching in church
8. Spending quality time with friends of own sex
9. Rescuing someone from hostile situation
10. Being a peacemaker in an aggressive situation
11. Asking for help
12. Making sure relatives are cared for as they get old
13. Taking risk
14. Cooking breakfast
15. Confronting people over their hypocrisy

The bible treats men & women as equal**Equally human**

Genesis 1:27 – So God created mankind in His own image ... male and female He created them.

1 Corinthians 11:12 – so as woman came from man so every man comes from woman.

Equal in value

Equal Pay Act – 40 years ago

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 10:10, "the worker is worth his or her keep"

Equal rights

Philippians 2:6,7 – Christ Jesus ... did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant, ...

Laying down our rights and authority to serve.

Human Rights Acts - 1948

Equal in intelligence

Jesus was radical in his approach to women. Completely reversed traditional and cultural viewpoints. Treated entirely equally.

Luke 10: 38-42 – Mary sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said ... Mary has chosen what is better.

Dorothy Sayers, the Christian writer and close friend of CS Lewis, concerning Jesus' attitude toward women: *Perhaps it was no wonder that women were first at the cradle and last at the cross. They had never known a man like this Man. There never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made sick jokes about them...who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out this sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no ax to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious. There was no act, no sermon, and no parable in the whole gospel that borrows pungency from female perversity. Nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything "funny" or inferior about women's nature.*

Equal in potential

Psalms 139:13-16 – you created my inmost being ... I am fearfully and wonderfully made All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be

"Women and men have the same potential to lead, create, innovate, achieve and be agents of change." (Jenny Baker, Equals, p9)

Equal in faith

John 1:11-12 - He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Acts 2:18 - Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days and they will prophesy.

Equal – equally human, equal in value, equal rights, in intelligence, in potential, in faith

Our gospel reaches out to all people with a message that says, whoever you are, whatever you are like, you have been created by God, in His image, to flourish in a thousand ways.

What about gender equality in the church?

Broad spectrum of opinions on the role and status of women and men in the church.

At the extreme end on either side:

- **Complementarianism**
- **Egalitarianism**

On the one side, there are those who believe there is a “divine order” in the church and home (as well, perhaps, in all of life), which demands male leadership and female subordination for all times and in all cultures. People who hold to this position sometimes title themselves “complementarians.” There is a great diversity of opinion, even among complementarians. On the other side of the divide are egalitarians. They believe that roles in the church (and often in marriage) are not determined by gender, but simply by calling and gifting. (*Rich Nathan*)

I take an egalitarianism position.

There are five bible passages which lead some to take a complementarian position.

- Genesis 2&3
- 1 Timothy 2:11-15
- 1 Corinthians 11:3
- 1 Corinthians 14:34
- Ephesians 5:22

*Read and comment? **Rich Nathan.***

It would take a couple of hours to unpack these verses properly and explain why I think there is confusion over what they mean. It is easy for us to read these words through a

21st century filter and not understand (1) what they meant and (2) just how revolutionary they were to the contemporary reader or listener.

However, some do come to a complementarian conclusion and although I can't agree, I have to allow that, 2000 years later it is not all as clear cut as we would all like.

I've given a backdrop of how men and women are more alike than they are different.

Few people would say that women are inferior to men in any meaningful way as concerns the roles they could play in church.

It comes down to a foundational theological perspective on whether you think the bible teaches that God meant women to be subservient to men or not. Hierarchy of authority.

My conclusion is that the bible teaches that men and women are equal in every way that pertains to calling, roles, behaviour, gifting and value.

Everyone – men and women – flourishes when they are saved because their identity is re-cast as a child of God – not as a “woman” or a “man” with all the constraints, small mindedness and short horizons that implies.

I believe that the fact that women are still not treated equally by society (by women and men) is as a result of the fall, as a result of mankind turning away from God, thinking they could do life better without him and failing miserably.

So we end up with men and women failing to realise their full humanity and true potential and both living a painful, restricted and lesser lives as a result.

Jesus' direction of travel

That was not how God created or intended it to be. And when Jesus came he brought a radical new approach to women – and men. He didn't fulfil the stereo-types and he treated people as though they were about to break out of the stereotypes.

That list of behaviours I asked you about earlier – they are all things Jesus did. He rescued men and women - and for that matter, children – from a prison of false expectations. He began to unlock the doors of his culture – inviting women into his entourage, revealing himself to them first after the resurrection, releasing leadership amongst them.

Paul's direction of travel

And Paul goes on to do the same, pressing further against the norms of that culture, releasing women into leadership and the operation of all the ministries in the church.

Conclusion

I believe that God created men and women in His image and as equals.

And in this church men and women are free to pray for the sick, serve refreshments, work with children, do the finances, paint walls, feed the hungry, cast out demons, give out Easter eggs, do the PA, pray, teach, sing, worship, prophesy and lead.

I believe that our message of salvation releases us from the sin of our behaviour and can heal the brokenness revealed in the unequal way we treat each other.

I believe His salvation releases your true potential to flourish in a thousand ways – whatever your gender.

David Flowers

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Resources:

Jenny Baker, Equals www.waterstones.com/book/equals/jenny-baker/

Anne Atkins, Split Image www.abebooks.co.uk

www.richnathan.org/article/why-vineyard-columbus-encourages-women-to-preach-pastor-church-plant/