

Synopsis

The manifested character of God and his promises teaches us about equality, and it provides a stark contrast to what the world around us believes. Is equality something to be sought after?

Introduction

Each generation has had to deal with the subject of the purpose of gender and our roles. Biblical examples have provided us with God's template for life and worship that we must follow. If we come to a different conclusion to that provided by examples in scripture, or to our historical practice, it indicates one of the following:

1. **Argument:** God's instructions for the roles of men and women were based on the culture in Biblical times, and not intended to be followed today.

Implications: God, and those he appointed, were powerless to work against the culture of the day and had to compromise.

2. **Argument:** God's instructions for the roles of men and women have been misunderstood and misapplied; there is a better interpretation that needs to be implemented.

Implications: God was unable to clearly reveal his instructions to the faithful throughout the generations. Or we are simply better at understanding God now.

3. **Argument:** God's instructions for the roles of men and women have been purposely corrupted by many throughout history for their own personal gain.

Implications: This indicates that all those who have done so will be condemned.

This is the first of the three arguments made to introduce change in formal worship, in respect to the role of gender.

1. Equality between women and men is to be achieved through these changes. Equality represents an unbiased approach to roles regardless of gender. Men are not better than women, thus limiting what women can do is chauvinistic and unequal.
2. The structure of worship has changed throughout history and should change again. Part of this argument is an observation of certain inconsistent historical and current examples. Our religious worship should not reflect the cultural chauvinistic practices of the past.
3. Competency based worship is a better use of our membership. We should have the 'best' person to do each role regardless of gender. God has given us talents; we should use them to their fullest.

What does the Bible say about equality?

Summary of Fundamental Principles

Class One – Biblical Fundamentals

In our last class we introduced three fundamental principles that will guide our study of equality.

1. The whole scripture is inspired
2. In the Beginning – Intelligent Design
3. What it means to be "In Christ"

Class Two – Biblical Equality

The three points we want to cover tonight are as follows.

1. Biblical Equality vs Worldly Equality
2. Life is not fair, neither do we want it to be
3. Is equality something to be grasped for?

Biblical Equality vs Worldly Equality

The BBC had a news article titled “The simmering tension between remote and in-office workers”. In it discusses the recent and dramatic changes in the workplace. The result of the COVID pandemic measures many found themselves forced to work from home. Over the past two years employment has reinforced this structure in every possible way. Employers have been hiring remote workers.

Employees have setup their own remote workspaces to be efficient and effective. Employees have embraced the paradigm and moved out of the city into remote rural areas. Now they are being asked to return to the office. Many are not happy about this. In many cases there is a significant divide and different expectations depending on the position, role, experience employees have in their companies.

Here are few quotes “A large chunk of the workforce, however, are being instructed by the same bosses to return to the office on a hybrid or full-time basis. That’s left employers with a problem: they’re appearing to show favouritism; bestowing flexibility to a select few workers, while enforcing restrictions upon the majority.” “However, giving some employees special working conditions can create perceptions of inequity, potentially dividing teams and stoking resentment. ‘If the decisions around who works from home and who has to go into the office are seemingly unfair, and that some employees have had a better deal, it has the potential to drive in-groups and out-groups in the workplace,’”. “This creates the risk of cliques, she adds, and the creation of a two-tier workforce with a majority of in-office employees and a minority of remote workers, potentially forming rifts between teams. And a lack of company cohesion linked to aggrieved employees can lead to a raft of negative consequences that might impact workforce dynamics, says Amy Butterworth, consulting director at London-based flexible-working consultants Timewise. ‘The quality of work will suffer, there is a big hit in relation to inclusion and you won’t get the best out of teams.’”

What we can readily see is that there is no equality in this situation. Some employees have a choice, other’s do not. Some are taking advantage of their circumstance, others are not. The decision-making process isn’t based visibly on efficiency, or competency, or costs. I state “visibly” because we don’t have the objective information that business may be using to drive their decisions. However, we can observe normal human nature behaviour in its predictive way. This inequality, then should not surprise us.

What we have here is a classical challenge of equality and expectations. Jesus provides us a parable which gives us a spiritual, or Biblical lens to view such things (Mat 20:1-16). The talents were not distributed equally. Each servants’ capabilities were perhaps not equal. The only equal thing expressed here is that the master expected his servants to use and earn something from what was given them.

Another example of inequality is expressed in the birth of Rebecca’s twins, Esau, and Jacob. God clearly states he loved Jacob and hated Esau (Rom 9:11-14). This was before any good or evil had occurred. Viewed by our fleshly lens, this is incompatible with equality, or in-partiality. God goes even further to frustrate our fleshly viewpoint by stating it’s his choice whether he will show compassion and mercy

(Rom 9:15-16). Continuing this reasoning we are informed that Pharaoh was raised up for the very purpose of destruction (Rom 9:17-23). The basis of the scriptural argument then is that God chooses what he will accomplish in his creation, not us.

The prophet Ezekiel has a whole chapter on equality. It provides for us a clear example of God's perspective of equality vs our own. Ezekiel's main point in the chapter is that "the soul who sins shall die" (Eze 18:4). Which if we're honest with ourselves, we're all guilty of. But the human or fleshly challenge is that we are often suffering for our forefather's sins (Eze 18:2). A critical component to understanding God's purpose and nature within this apparent situation of inequality and apparent contradiction is that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Eze 18:23, 32). It is God's purpose that we change our behaviour. However, the apparent contradiction of inequality is expressed by the Children of Israel, as they condemn God for not being equal (Eze 18:25, 29). Which is it then, who is truly unequal?

What then do we learn about Biblical equality? Not all are chosen by God. He doesn't choose us based on our superior qualities. Just as he did not pick the nation of Israel for their greatness. They were selected because of Abraham's faithfulness. Something of which had nothing to do with them. Just as God chooses one for glory, he chooses another for destruction. Not all receive equal distribution of talents, opportunity, or experiences in life.

The Psalmist also observes this contradiction of equality and was frustrated by it. However, in observing it through the lens of scripture he comes to an important realization and conclusion (Psa 73:1-15). His conclusion is that when viewed through the vantage point God provides, those who choose the ways of the world are condemned to die, while those who choose God's way are offered life (Psa 73:16-28).

- World equality is not the same as Biblical equality
- Equal in condemnation. All have sinned, all will die.
- Not equal in outcome, yet those redeemed all receive the reward of eternal life
- Equal in requirement of faith
- God does not prefer one gender over the other, he simply prefers faithful vs faithless

Equality then is only truly found in the conclusion of our life choices, specifically we are offered by God a simple choice, eternal life, or eternal death. This is the only equality offered. We are all sinners and thus condemned equally to death (Rom 3:21-23). But, through God's grace and our faith we can be redeemed from this condemnation (Rom 3:24-31).

5 minutes for discussion

Clarification questions? Is Biblical equality the same as equality expressed in the world around us? Is God partial, does he favour some over others? Is equality important? If so how should we express it if it is extremely clear that in the creation around us God has not made things equal?

Life is Not Fair, Neither Do We Want it to Be

Building then upon our scriptural understanding of equality, we then need to consider the concept of fairness. It is clear that the Bible does not support the concept of equality as expressed by the world around us. In fact, the Bible goes out of its way to teach us that we are no more than wild animals if we do not adhere to the principles found within scripture. If then the Bible is blatantly stating our lives will

not be equal by God's choice, then we can easily conclude this is not fair. Fair in the sense understood by the world around us.

We and our children learn about fairness quickly. We teach our children that things should be fair. They often state, "it's not fair", or "that's not fair". Children are quick to use this argument to ensure no one else gets an unequal quantity of something. While parents are quick to use this argument to reduce conflict amongst children. Once again, is this a scriptural point of view, or is it worldly? What is the basis for our decision to declare something fair or unfair?

The prophet Jeremiah gives us some insight, and it isn't 'fair' (Jer 17:9-11). We deceive ourselves into believing things that are beneficial to us, from our own limited perspective, should be at a minimum fairly distributed. Of course, we won't complain if we receive extra of a good thing.

The Bible states bluntly that the only fair outcome of our natural fleshly ways, is death (Rom 5:12). However, in contrast it also offers a free gift which is not based on fairness (Rom 5:15). This contrast of our fair condemnation to death vs the unfair gift of eternal life (Rom 6:23) is a constant refrain throughout scripture. The purpose of this great difference is stated clearly, so that God may receive the glory and not man (Rom 7:13 cp 1Cor 1:29-31).

The Bible provides a clear and concise expression of fairness as described in James' (Jam 1:13-18). It is our own natural ways that lead to our fair condemnation of death, whereas it is God's unfair character that has bestowed us with life and hope of eternal life.

Was it fair that Adam was made first? Was it fair that the woman was made from the man and for the man? (Gen 2:18, 21-24 cp 1Cor 11:7-9). Was it fair that man is condemned without any hope, whereas the woman has hope through childbirth (Gen 3:15-19)? Was it not Eve who introduced sin, not Adam, yet Adam is the one considered responsible for sin upon us all, not Eve (Rom 5:14, 17)? Is this fair? Is it fair that men represent the head which is symbolic of Jesus Christ? Whereas women are represented as the body, which is symbolic of the ecclesia? One an expression of maleness while the other femaleness (1Cor 11:3, 7-8; Eph 4:14-16; Eph 5:23; Col 1:18-19)

Jesus once again provides us a parable that places the world's view of fairness vs God's (Mat 20:1-16). Each received the wage agreed upon by the master regardless of the unfair inequality of the effort put in. Was it fair? No, it was not. Was it right? Yes, it was.

- Men and women are physically different. Women have a womb, men do not. Men have greater physical strength.
- We were not made equal by God. It's God's intent that we be joined together, to be complete
- God appoints the base to rule in the kingdoms of men (Dan 4:34-35)
- The law - a male cost more than a female
- The law - a female could be released from a vow, a male could not
- The Law - required additional restoration requirements, it wasn't based 100% on equality (Lev 5-6)
- God has pigeonholed us as a girl or boy. He chooses what are and how we will serve. It isn't about fairness, or equality. The man to die through service, the woman to bring forth life through travail.

- The Bible is extremely male presented. Women are in the context of men always. All inspired works are recorded by men. We either conclude that God's word has been tainted by human chauvinistic historical culture, or we understand God is teaching us important principles.
- Equality is related to fairness, yet the world is not fair. Fairness would result in eternal death.

We do not want fairness as expressed by the world, if we are spiritually minded. We want God's unfair love and mercy. We thank him for our life, we thank him for the blessings we receive, we thank him for our trials, we thank him for his mercy. He is righteous, we are not. God has appointed each of us, male and female, a specific role to play in his creation. It is not based on fairness, or equality. It is based on God's will, his character, his purpose. We can choose to as servants commit to the tasks assigned to us, or we can be disobedient and receive our fair and just condemnation.

5 minutes for discussion

Clarification questions? Is life fair? Are we all made equal? What spiritual lessons are we to learn by this observation both in nature and within scripture? Is there beauty and completeness found in equality and inequality, and what does that teach us about our relationship with each other and our God?

Is Equality Something to be Grasped For?

If then the Bible does little to support equality or fairness, in the sense expressed by the world. Should we even be seeking after equality? Should equality be an objective or the basis of the decisions we make. Should equality be an expression of our words and deeds?

The serpent rightly expressed that by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, that Eve would become more like God (Gen 3:1-7). Specifically, in her appreciation and understanding of good and evil. Up to that point there was no experience that she could observe that would explain evil. All she knew, was 'good'. Evil was an abstraction, a fact, or definition that could be read out of a dictionary. The literal explanation of disobedience, which would lead to death, was not understood. Yet there was a natural desire to be like God, to be equal, to live up to their potential. Interestingly enough, the tree of life clearly had no appeal to the flesh. Not in its current state. They were already living, why would they need to eat the tree of life? They had a choice, obey, or disobey. They had a choice, take, or patiently wait to be given.

The letter to the Philippians provides us an insight into understanding equality (Phi 2:1-11). The KJV states "thought it not robbery to be equal with God", but this does not correct express the meaning of the statement. The literal translation is 'he did not think to take equality', or 'he would not by force or self will place himself as equal'. The passage goes out of its way to highlight Jesus' mind was that of an obedient servant, humble, contrite, and willing to sacrifice his own life.

We know that it is by divine principle that self sacrifice (death of the flesh) is a requirement for salvation (Heb 5:7-9, 11-14). How is it equal that Jesus Christ was preordained to die for our sins, when he himself was sinless?

Jesus while the son of God and appointed king of the world, came as a servant. Washed his disciples feet, and died the death of a criminal. How is this equal? How is this fair? It isn't! Jesus by divine forethought and wisdom was expressly brought into the world for this purpose. By his own freewill

Jesus choose to do his Father's will, not his own. If then, this is the divine scriptural example provided, what template should we govern our own lives by?

What then do we make of the equality expressed in the Bible? Surely, we should not only understand the difference between Biblical equality vs worldly equality, but we should be an expression of Biblical equality in our daily lives.

- No male or female in the kingdom as saints (Gal 3:27-29)
- Korah, Dathan, Abiram were men of renown. The whole congregation was holy they said (Num 16:1-3)
- Mariam and Aaron grasped to replace Moses (Num 12:1-15)
- Simeon the sorcerer attempted to purchase the ability to share the Holy Spirit (Act 8:18-24)
- Ananias and Saphira attempted to lie to have positions in the ecclesia (Act 5:1-11)

5 minutes for discussion

Clarification questions? God has called us to be like him, he has called us out to be holy. How do we actively try to be like God, while at the same time not attempt to take this honour by force? What is God teaching us by the natural inequalities between male and female? What is God teaching us by placing the two trees in the garden of Eden?

Conclusion

For much of human history, chauvinistic practices, and the oppression of women have been commonplace. For the last hundred and fifty years it could be stated that maleness, or the qualities, or opportunities of maleness were more desirable than those of femaleness. I use the terms loosely. Feminism had two main thrusts of purpose. Firstly, to remove the unequal oppression of women, and secondly to enable equal opportunity for all roles in society regardless of a person's gender. For the most part this was achieved in 1st world countries, however, at a cost that is still not fully understood. Which is the podium of maleness being glorified and sought after even by women, and the destruction and vilifying the structure of family life. There is now growing a worldly view that is becoming more common in this day-in-age, that gender is a form of oppression. That it is an injustice to be born a male or female, that we should instead have a choice in the matter.

If the basis for our opinion or actions is to establish or express equality, we are almost guaranteed to be wrong. Equality has never been something to be grasped after, nor is it to be placed on some kind of pedestal. Equality is rather something that God will provide only at the judgement seat. For those who worship Him in sincerity and truth, eternal life. For those who lived according to the fashion of this world, eternal condemnation, death.

What then is our motive for the things we think, we speak, or the things we do? Do our motives express our own opinion of ourselves? Or perhaps represent our own view of our capabilities and competencies? Or should we rather strive to manifest characteristics God has designed to be expressed in this natural creation? Does God know and understand what is best for us and what is best for others? Does his divine wisdom and foreknowledge enable Him to choose what gender and what role we play in our short lives?

Recall the argument being made for change is as follows.

Equality between women and men is to be achieved through these changes. Equality represents an unbiased approach to roles regardless of gender. Men are not greater than women, thus limiting what women can do is chauvinistic and unequal.

I ask then if the argument being made for equality is according to Godly wisdom?