



Genesis 1:26-28

TITLE

BATH HOTEL 1

BATH HOTEL 2

The Bath Hotel was a top class hotel opened in 1877 for the rich and famous. It was burned down in April 1914 by two Suffragettes who targeted the building because of its connection with the privileged and politicians. Why did they do it? To enable women to have the same right to vote as men.

We are all familiar with the idea of equal rights for women in all areas of our nation's life and it is an accepted principle, but it wasn't that long ago that it wasn't regarded as the case

CLIPPINGS

This picture was taken in 1968 showing London bus conductors on strike. Women were paid less, had different rights to men and were barred from many occupations regarded men only. How things have changed and for the better.

Part of the move for equality over the last 50 years or so has been the recognition that all human beings have equal rights and we must not discriminate between them.

BUT MEN AND WOMEN ARE DIFFERENT

That said, it doesn't take much of a genius to recognise that men and women are different and is the butt of jokes both by men and women. Here are a few.

VIDEO CLIP

Most jokes like these are just laughed at but we all know that there are also stereotypes which have no foundation that people take more seriously and base their judgement on them. "Men are better drivers than women" "Women can't understand the offside rule" "All men are cheats"

SOME KNOWN DIFFERENCES 1

SOME KNOWN DIFFERENCES 2

CULTURAL NORMS FOR THE ROLE OF MEN AND WOMEN VARY BETWEEN SOCIETIES

There are hundreds of genuine differences, but men and women are treated differently between societies too. Go to Muslim dominated societies and we all know that women don't have the same rights as men. In many countries women don't have the same access to education, the same access to jobs, have to wear special clothes in public and have less legal rights than men. That shocks us now, but it was actually the norm here a century ago.

MEN AND WOMEN: EQUAL YET DIFFERENT

So what does the Bible say about this? Just one verse in Genesis tells us what we need to know although similar verses appear throughout Scripture: God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female

MEN AND WOMEN: EQUAL YET DIFFERENT: GAL 3:28

There are two phrases here. The first is that God made human beings like Himself. We are all made in God's image. Here's what Gal 3:28 says *So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.* God regards us all equally. We are all sinners and we all need the same Saviour.

MEN AND WOMEN: EQUAL YET DIFFERENT IF BOTH SPOUSES WERE THE SAME

So we are made the same, but God has made us come in two different sorts: male and female. Why? Verse One reason is rather obvious – we need each other to reproduce. But He gave us both the task of managing the Earth. Not just the men, the women too. Why? Because it requires both to be able to do it. Someone once said that if both spouses were the same, we wouldn't need one of them. The human world needs both genders to operate, both biologically, socially and spiritually. I remember a scene from Thomas the Tank Engine where Donald, a Scottish engine with attitude fell out with an awkward Guard's Van. "Och ey; I'd be doing without you" said Donald. "You can't" said the Guard's Van "I'm essential". Donald went on to ignore the Guards Van, only to get derailed because the Guards Van was essential to provide extra braking.

Never think you can do without the other half of the human race. You can't; they're essential. God made it that way.

So, we've both been given the same task but our differences are as important as our similarities and that doesn't just apply to gender differences, but race, culture and so on.

SEPARATE MINISTRIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN?

Is it the same with church? It's no surprise to find that church is as diverse as society. Our unity is made up from our diversity – Paul gives the analogy of a body – one body, but it's the different bits that make the whole thing work. Gender differences will always be reflected in some way within the body of the church, although sometimes it reflects the culture in which we are set.

Up to about 30 years ago most churches had a men's and women's ministry. It actually reflects gender roles at that time. The women's ministry was always the stronger of the two due to many women remaining at home. The afternoon women's meeting was a typical part of church life: an opportunity for women to worship together and get teaching from other women: opportunities often denied them in main church activities. Men's ministry has been weak in churches for almost as long as I can remember. This is in contrast to women's work which has traditionally much stronger.

IN OUR CULTURE GENDER HAS

Over the years, the changing role of women in society is reflected in the church, with women working during the day and opportunities for teaching and participating in church life being less gender-linked. That's good in many respects and over the past couple of decades, we've followed society's trend in moving away from gender-specific ministry towards inclusive activity. Even what was gender-specific ministry has been "inclusivised" e.g. mother and toddler groups become parent and toddler groups or women's groups have changed to inclusive ones.

So in a world where we like to express our common humanity, should we be bothered about gender difference in the 21st century church. Well, let's have a look at a few statistics.

ATTENDANCE

Men are not very good at attending church. Reasons cited in surveys is that men think that church is a female thing to do – it appeals to the emotion. It's seen as wimpy and weak. I'd dispute that, but I can see where the idea might come from. We're fortunate in MRBC to have a lot of involved men – that's not so true elsewhere/

THE FAMILY EFFECT

One of the most remarkable discoveries of the last decade or so has been the influence parents have on the churchgoing of their family. Churches put a lot of resources into children's work and have traditionally done so. But win a child, and it is most unlikely the rest of the family will come to church. If we work with women, then that percentage goes up. But what if it's the man, the dad who comes to Christ. What's the likelihood that the rest of the family will come.

93%

It's a surprising result. Where families are functional, an engaged father or step-father can make a massive difference to how the family views spiritual things. For all we talk of social change, men still have an important role in the way families are shaped. It shocked the survey people that carried this out. It has huge implication as to how we reach men, women and their families as a church. Let me suggest a few things:

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO: TARGET MEN

I thought of some other way to put this, but I couldn't. It's simply this. God wants us to reach men. It's not easy, but it can be done. Men, don't forget your next activity. But it's important that we as a church pray for our men and men that we come into contact with. Pray that they might come to know Jesus. It won't just make a difference to them, but to their families as well. It's a key mission priority for the 21st century church. And how do we engage men? That's our challenge!

RECOGNISE THE NEEDS OF YOUNGER WOMEN

As I said earlier, church has traditionally been better engaged towards contacting and meeting the needs of women. However, many women's activities in churches go towards the upper end of the age band.

WORK WITH FAMILIES

The third area in which we can engage men and younger women for that matter is through trying to reach them as families. In fact for the younger generation, it's an important way of sharing faith with a generation who have no tradition or experience of churchgoing. In an environment where people don't understand church and certainly don't send their children, we need to explore opportunities for showing them the love of Christ and leading them to faith. For most churches including ours, it needs quite a big shift in thinking because family life isn't quite as quaint and functional as it may have been years ago. Families these days tend to be dysfunctional but it's a real opportunity to bring real freedom and the power of God to individuals and families who hurt and are in difficult situations. There's no shortage of them. Let's start to pray and to work towards bringing Jesus into those situations and watch Him make a difference.

This morning has been an opportunity to firstly affirm the word of God, to recognise gender difference and to see the challenge that brings to how we do church, and to how we seek to reach people that God loves and desires them to come into that living and dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. The Good News hasn't changed, but the way we need to deliver it into our society has – let's rise to that challenge as a church.

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