

Equality in Christ and in the World

Rev. Philip Hale – St. Paul, Bancroft and St. John, Lyons NE

February 2, 2015

The LCMS is not united in doctrine. Further evidence of this came in the mail: a journal from Christians for Biblical Equality entitled “One Image One Purpose One Baptism.” The first two articles came from within the LCMS critiquing our historic stance on man and woman, with an eye toward ordaining women in our church. Being historic is not enough—tradition is not our authority. So we must weave a coherent picture, derived from Scripture, of male and female that does not contradict the Gospel, which is what modern proponents of equality fail to do.

Elizabeth Goodine, a commissioned teacher in the LCMS and evidently married to rostered LCMS pastor David Goodine, has become one of the biggest proponents for the ordination of women in the LCMS, along with Pastor Matthew Becker. They are both featured on the website ordainwomennow.com and Dr. Goodine is listed as the president of OWN. These proponents of male/female egalitarianism misunderstand the Gospel, turning it into a social tool to achieve worldly change. This is not coincidental. Those who make earthly equality the overriding goal have lost the reason for the created distinctions between the sexes and the purpose for which God the Son became man.

The pertinent texts of Scripture are dealt with by those seeking women’s ordination, but Scripture does not form their theology. Rather, they obfuscate and diffuse the clear texts by calling them “obscure” (Becker) or misinterpret them according to a preconceived biblical “pattern” (Goodine). But God’s Word remains strong against all attacks which try to make the truth palatable to the world. “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted

to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.” (I Cor. 14:33-34; NKJV). Dr. Goodine makes this merely descriptive of Paul’s day, not formative for our thought and practice. Christians faithful to Christ should confess that this is a positive word, a divine word, still today.

It must be stated clearly: men and women will never be equal. It is impossible. To say otherwise is to deny reality. The Gospel does not undo biological differences. “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.” (I Pet. 3:7). A universal equality is a religious falsehood, yet it is an American god. Women will never be equal to men in physical strength. Rarely do men and women directly compete against one another in sports. It is not fair for unequals. But men will also never be equal to women in the ability to give birth, show tenderness, or be a mother. A society that defines justice as sameness in outward works is weakly and sick. Family, the cradle of new life, will be despised because children and marriage must be despised where equality is worshiped. A family based on equality between all its members is a godless farce.

The main biblical support for worldly equality is supposedly Gal. 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This is absolutely true, but it is has been secularized. The preposition “in” is universally ignored. In Christ we are one, since the same Spirit creates faith in the promise which leads to the eternal life. But we are not fully *in* Christ. We live in a sinful world and retain our sinful nature until we leave it. The world is not Christ. We retain worldly structures and orders, even in churches. The Gospel does not correct unfair abuses of power. That would make the Gospel a destructive and coercive power. Instead, Christ calls us to wait for a new heaven and earth while trusting in His justification, which says we are righteous—not merely equal to select sinners.

Order, obligations, and subjection are not the religious problems of this world. Sinners do misuse God-given authority, but the Gospel does not change the world. The forgiveness of sins in Christ enlightens man’s heart, because the promise changes how he is seen before the Father. This is a status before God, not before sinners in this world. It does not undo our God-given

roles and duties which the commandments assume. Our citizenship in Christ is not on earth, but in heaven. So, the Gospel is not about faith in earthly equality, which is an impossible ideal. Christ did not die to make me equal in power to my neighbor, but righteous before the Father, so that I may love my neighbor. This love is shown by obedience, submission, and exercising authority in a godly way according to our station in the world.

Equality speaks of comparison. Being equal to another sinner is not the Gospel. Rather, the Gospel justifies. It gives Christ's righteousness as a gift in faith. The Father sees us as clothed in Baptism with Christ, so we lack nothing. It is true *in* Christ and comes to us through a promise which generates internal faith. It is not a matter of leverage, force, or laws. Justification does not mean that everyone should preach or make laws or arrest evil-doers or choose their gender. The order of this world remains over all flesh. Even physical slavery does not touch this spiritual freedom which no man can take away. "Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men" (I Cor. 7:21-23). Freedom is in the invisible Spirit, who resides within us and causes us to call out to the loving Father, revealed by Christ's suffering and death. It is not in doing what we want with the body, which can only be sinful. Freedom is only *in* Christ, not *in* fleshly actions. What we should do with our body that God designed does not change when the Gospel is proclaimed.

Behind the proponents of worldly equality is a religious fixation on man's works. They belittle Christ and His works by focusing on outward changes accomplished by man. In Christ, we are passive in faith, but we live and serve within the creation which has not yet been released from the bondage of corruption. However, the unfairness of this world is not the subject matter of the Gospel. Instead, our great guilt of dissatisfaction and disobedience to God who made us is forgiven. We all deny God by our sins and discontentment with our position and divine placement. In Christ's love, however, we trust that the Lord will use us as He ordained and sees fit. We are called to serve with an eternal hope where we are placed and how we were made, not to rebel against necessary order. We must have earthly order or the Gospel will be lost. True

equality in the fullest American sense is anarchy. You are not equal to the government or those in authority above you. All authority is from God, even when abused by sinners (Rom. 13).

Everyone must be in submission. For the renewed Christian this is a light burden, because God's mercy overwhelms all the injustices we face on earth. The Gospel does not vitiate or overrule God's good creation. "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (I Cor. 11:3). This is a reality. Where some choose to ignore it or explain it as outdated, God's order still stands. Sinners will struggle to fulfill these divine roles of leading and submitting. But injustice on earth causes us to cherish righteousness in Christ all the more.

Creation is pitted against redemption in the arguments for women's ordination. The equality card is played against nature. But I do not become equal to any person by believing. Women do not become interchangeable with men through faith. This is a fleshly, worldly, satanic gospel being perpetuated. It is as ludicrous as saying that believing in Jesus will make me equal in speed to the sprinter Usain Bolt. Faith is passive trust that Christ has completely earned our salvation and that, in His body, we are clean. This righteousness is entirely God's work, not man's. The Gospel does not rail against creation, as if God mistakenly created man unequal at the beginning and now we have to pretend men and women are the same, when their anatomy is certainly not.

Christians do not live for a pale pretension of equality, but life with Christ in heaven. Submission in marriage, the Church, and the world is God-pleasing in Christ. Christ's death and resurrection do not nullify God's order and law. Rather, believers submit to all authorities out of respect and thanks for Jesus. It something the Christian woman seeks, even if it is unfair and difficult, because it is a holy work in faith. The most faithful way to be a creature of God is in accordance with one's divinely created gender. Men are called to lead in love, not just to get their own way. In Scripture, sin came from Adam, even though Eve sinned first. This is due to the principle of headship. For the Christian, differentiated roles are not about a power struggle, but pleasing God who made us for certain worldly purposes in His wisdom. The world, ignorant of freedom in Christ, cannot know that the internal freedom of the Spirit is compatible

with rigidly defined outward roles. All supposed equality in the world's eyes is death. It is purely man's opinion and work. It cannot grant life or appease God's just anger over sin. It is worldly thinking that clouds the true Gospel of life in Jesus' crucified body.

True justice is found in God's eyes, not the world's. Submission to Christ is a light duty, just as is submission to husband or any other earthly authority God has put over us. There is no contradiction between spiritual freedom in Christ and biologically prescribed earthly duties. Faith does not change our place in this world, but in Christ we are a new creation and justified before the only Judge that matters. There is only one God, a God of order.

Man is distinguished into male and female for the purpose of marriage, God's own institution. For a God-pleasing marriage and a healthy society man and woman must be outwardly unequal. A true martial unity and earthly peace cannot exist between equal sinners—that is a two-headed snake, a monstrous perversion. However, this does not mean inequality in spiritual gifts, in God's truth, or *in* Christ. The LCMS has always advocated education for women. But everyone is to use their gifts outwardly according to the Lord's will. This is not an oppressive law. The believer, freed from eternal punishment, recognizes that God created him and placed him in a specific body for certain purposes. There is Christian freedom in the Spirit, but order, including God-given gender, is never an evil to be demolished. Freedom is spiritual. It is never formless in this world, as if the body is unconcerned with Christ. Man does not get to define the Gospel according to his wishes or concerns. It is simply the forgiveness of sins in Christ's blood. God's creative will does not become null in Christ. Such a claim pits God against God.

Ultimately, everything man does in this world is sinful, since it is enacted by sinners. So trying to change the order of the sexes must fail. It is as fruitless as a sex-change operation. It will merely be external and draw attention away from Jesus who offered His life in holiness for the world's sins. He did not die to increase the wages or political power of a certain minority class. The Gospel according to Mrs. Goodine is: "a pattern whereby God lifts up the lowly (those deemed as lessor in society and brings down the mighty (those deemed by the world to be greater in terms of status and power)."

This is more Karl Marx than Jesus Christ. Rather, the righteousness of Christ is granted to all who repent of their works and cling to what Christ

already did for all mankind. Only Christ's works in this world can lift us up to God and make unimpeachable righteousness everlasting ours. Jesus is diminished and denied by making the Gospel into a legal scepter that enforces man's perverted idea of equality.

The Gospel does not lead to dissatisfaction with the body God gave us. True faith finds peace in the life to come, not in demolishing power structures on earth. A disciple of Christ seeks to do God's will and God-pleasing works. We are never told to work against our bodies or deny them in Scripture. Rather, our hope is so far removed from earthly works that no injustice, unfairness, or disadvantage we suffer can touch it, since it is in Christ, who is God above all men.

The Gospel as social lever is atheistic by nature. It cares only about the things we see and touch. Christ died to give God's peace. The Gospel is not a spark for rebellion against good order ordained by God. Rebellion against sexual distinction is rebellion against the God who created it. If male and female were made to do the same things outwardly, then God simply failed in making us. But being forgiven in Christ does not change the body or our role in this world. We serve where God called us. We carry our cross, undoubtedly shaped by our gender, in patient hope. At the last day all injustice will end and we will be declared righteous.

The Church's job is not to regulate unbelievers or alter the world through a political gospel. When the one Gospel is lost, atheistic ones will sprout like weeds. The answer is not dissatisfaction with God's Word, but willing submission to it in Christ. Redemption and creation are not opposed. Justification deals with our undeserved status before God granted as a gift, not our works in the world. "Oppressive and narrow power structures" are inconsequential compared to life in Christ (OWN statement). The sad conclusion is that when the knowledge of male and female is lost and denied, so is Christ Himself, along with true righteousness that our loving Father deigns to give everyone. "Only let each person lead the life [in the body] that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him" (I Cor. 7:17; ESV). Amen.