

May a Gentleman Hold the Door for a Lady (and Other Questions Between the Sexes)?

When I was working for Barnes and Noble in the mid-2000s, I worked with a young lady named Jackie. She was charming and pleasant, generally not confrontational. Born and raised in an Irish-Catholic family, Jackie had gone off to college. She didn't go to some radical east or west coast school...she went to Truman State. But while she was there, Jackie was *indoctrinated*. She was told (by her professors and classmates) *that men and women are the same*, there are **no** differences between them, and anyone who tries to reinforce differences is a misogynist.¹ This was revealed one day when **I tried to hold the door open for her**. She refused to go in. Utterly refused. Instead she gestured *for me to go first*. As we worked together, this became a thing between us. If she saw me coming, she would race to the door to beat me, so that *she* could hold it open for *me*. Her point: you are no better than me, no different, and by accepting your gesture of an open door, I would be accepting that I am somehow “weaker” than you. I, of course, being immature, began looking for ways to tweak her, refusing to enter into a door she held for me. We had discussions about this off and on. One day I finally asked her, “Jackie, you know where I learned to hold a door for a woman?” “No,” she said. “My mother!” She just smirked.

Now this little story has stuck with me. I knew then in my gut that Jackie was fighting for things she didn't really believe and against things she knew to be true. At that time, I couldn't articulate why; I just knew that she was confused. Being a man of faith, I should have treated her with love and respect. Instead of tweaking her, I should have won her over with gentleness. Being a man of faith in Christ, means I should have tolerated her views (put up with them even though I disagreed with her) but spoke the truth in love to her **to try to win her over in a winsome way**. The fact was my own immaturity rendered me incapable of doing so. I probably reinforced her own views about men *through my lack of love*.

There are many such examples that demonstrate how the natural, created, very good differences between the sexes have gotten steamrolled. These differences are being replaced with a view of **radical equality**, the one into which Jackie was indoctrinated. Radical equality is the belief that man and woman are equal *in every single way*. Every single way. Are men and women equal? Of course. We are both created in the image of God and are created with equal dignity, value and worth. *This is an undeniable fact of creation*.

But radical equality takes equality past any created differences. It plays itself out in some very disturbing ways. For instance, when I see women participating in mixed martial arts, it bothers me. Simply on a gut level. Your reaction to this may be, “Ohh...c'mon...a woman has a right to do anything a man does...” I don't know about “rights”. I guess a woman has the “right”, legally. But it bothers me on a gut-level to see a woman *acting with brutality*.

But radical equality is being institutionalized and if you follow radical equality to its logical conclusion, **there are some very stark, disturbing end points**. We are living with one today—

¹ A misogynist is one who is prejudiced against women and thinks them inferior to men.

gender fluidity. This is the belief that there are no gender differences, but also that *a person is free to choose what gender they desire to be*. Is this okay? I ask the question because many softly adopt radical presuppositions that have tremendous societal consequences. In other words, we collectively, societally, *shrug our shoulders*. Is it okay that our daughters should be forced to register for the Selective Services so that they can be drafted?² Is it okay that we should have a mandated equal number of women who are police officers and firefighters, and to achieve this “noble” end, we lower crucial standards?³ The argument that is often put forward is that of “choice” and “access”, and that all women should have the same opportunities as men. My greater concern as a Christian is: *do these ends really reflect God’s design and desire for women and for men?*

So, may a man hold a door for a woman? Is it okay as a woman to walk through a held-door? My wife and daughters have had several experiences of late involving young men *who act as if they (the ladies) weren’t there and they don’t matter*. Clueless. **These are the men we are raising**. Men who cut in front of women. Who don’t wait their turn. Who use their strength to man the life boats and leave the “weaker” stranded. A literal and proverbial “every man for himself.” This is the inevitable, logical, formative conclusion of steamrolling the sexes—a society full of a bunch of jerks who only care about *numero uno*.

My concern is what God’s Word says. What His creation attests. God’s Word says that we are both created in the image of God (equally valuable!), but that both sexes were created *differently, having unique purposes*.⁴ The man and the woman are created to “fit together”. The positive role of the Christian man is one who accepts this unique purpose and role, being responsible for those that God has given. No matter who you are, where God has put you, He has given you all responsibilities. Whether you are young, single, married or unmarried, a widow or widower, a grandparent or grandchild...whether you live at home or on your own...God has given men people we are responsible for, unique to us.

Responsibility and duty is what being a man is all about. Do not misunderstand me! I am not saying that women aren’t responsible for things. What I am saying, is that ultimately *God holds the man accountable for the family and for those whom He has given*. Negatively, when a man is **not** responsible it has dire consequences on those around him. Appealing to the Biblical account, when Eve doubts God’s Word and eats from the tree, then gives the fruit to her husband (who was standing with her!) ...God doesn’t confront the woman, He confronts the man! **Adam is held responsible**. In the narrative of Genesis Two, **the man** is the one who is given the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of God and evil. This occurs before the woman was created. This command is not seen as a burden, but as *a boundary*. It was, then, Adam’s responsibility to tell his wife of this boundary. That she knows of it is clear based on what she

² This issue came before Congress last fall and was narrowly defeated. Known as Draft Our Daughters, this was added to an amendment to a defense bill, the National Defense Authorization Act.

³ As a practical matter, if my house is burning down, send me the biggest and strongest fire fighter you got!

⁴ The entire creation account of Genesis Two underscores this, and to deny it, one has to completely allegorize it.

says to the serpent. The point: *it was Adam's responsibility to inform his wife and keep her from transgressing this boundary*. Ultimately, Adam is the one who is responsible for the fall into sin. This is not only an idea from the Old Testament. St. Paul also reflects this in Romans 5: sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin...which he goes on to call the “transgression of Adam”. Not Eve, but Adam...even though it was Eve who ate the fruit first.

So what does it mean to be a creature⁵ of faith and live according to God's purposes? I'm talking about structures and an order. Something to conform to, be molded into, something to fit in or under. To live in accord with God's design means to submit to His Word. It means to submit to our place in His design. But our very sinful nature fights against this. We don't want to submit to anything...or anyone.

That's why it's always about Jesus. Being a creature of faith is to be one who has received the forgiveness of sins won by Jesus Christ alone. The fact is that we will fail on our own power. But a creature of faith is one who simply receives gifts and is always in a posture of repentance. This is so important and crucial to this topic. I fail often in my roles as protector and provider. But a creature of faith is one who knows that one must live accordance with God's will and that they will fail. But in my baptism, where I am daily put to death and made alive, I can let my head hit the pillow, forgiven for my failure and try better tomorrow.

Through the blood of Jesus, we live as new creatures. Recreated and repurposed to live lives in accordance with God's will. This happens through Word and Sacrament. The rhythm of a life of worship—receiving God's gifts and His forgiveness sustains us in our duties as creatures. Worship is where we hear God's Word and receive absolution for our failures. In other words, the first thing is the first thing. It's Jesus.

In light of that, I can say two things. The first thing is forgiven, **we live to serve the other**. To love. Not aimlessly, but one who seeks to live in accordance with God's best for me, because God's best *serves His other creatures the best*. As such, and this is the second thing...**we can mature in the faith**. We can get better in living for others. We can conform and shape our lives around what He wants us to be doing and strive to do it better. Not because “better” makes us anything before God, but because “better” is our active participation in God's world for others.

In order to live better in our created roles better, there are several strategies. One is through imitation. The greatest form to imitate is Jesus. His selflessness. His sacrifice. The picture of Jesus washing his disciple's feet on the night in which he was betrayed. We also imitate others who are in Christ. Paul says in 1 Cor. 11: *be imitators of me as I am of Christ*. We look to the examples in our lives that exhibit these roles. We follow their examples. As we do so, *we become*

⁵ I intentionally use the word “creature” to emphasize that we are the product of a Creator. We are not simply “beings” who determine our course and purpose, but are guided by the Creator's will and intent. Some of this is “hard-wired” into our brains and physiology.

better at doing them. This is why intergenerational fellowship is so key. If we only rely on our peer group, we miss out on many opportunities to watch and learn, to teach and train.

A second strategy, an extension of imitation, is to actively teach and hand down things. Now I'm speaking to fathers—teach your sons to be men and your daughters what a man looks like! Some activities you might already do this. Baseball, soccer, hunting, fixing the car...but I'm advocating that we actually take the time to show young men and boys what it “looks like” to protect and provide, and how to do it. This is training young boys to be men. Men of faith, who provide and protect, must pass on their wisdom, especially to those whom God has given them. In this way, women are served and daughters know what to expect from the men in their future lives.

Where does this leave us? As Christians, we are daily tempted to give in, give up and go along. It's so easy. This is the internal struggle that we face. The easy path. The truth is that much of the world is scandalized by God's design for man and woman—that *we are created and that we are different, unique, and diverse.* This very idea is offensive. Even to some Christians. It is easy to go along and sit back, and accept what the world tells us.

But being people of faith means we fight for the truth. We fight against ideas that attack God's design and God's structure. We fight against the fall. We fight by being responsible...responding to the situations in life you are put into and having ownership for it. We fight by handing down our faith. We fight by modeling it, by training our sons and daughters, teaching our children to live the way God intends us to live. And for younger people without families yet, we fight by preparing ourselves to take on the tasks God may give. For lifelong bachelors or bachelorettes who haven't been given the gift of a family, there are still many people that God has put into your life to serve. This design works whether we have families or not.

So, may a man hold a door for a woman? My 70-year old mother would say *absolutely.* My recently departed 88 year old grandmother *would slap me* if I didn't hold a door for a woman. The things we took for granted from the past—chivalry, decorum, modesty, respect for elders, manners...it's all going away. I would go so far to say that a man **must** hold a door for woman. With courtesy and respect. And if you don't...then you aren't a real man. You are a child. A little boy in an oversized body. Men, hold the door for the ladies in your life...even strangers. Pull out their chairs. Open their car doors. Stand up when they enter a room. And ladies—let the men do their jobs that God created them to do. With graciousness and appreciation. Our world needs men to be men. Now more than ever.