

Children of God, or, Boys and girls

By [Diane Roth](#)

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For some reason or another, lately I've been remembering a particular Christmas, when my sister and I both got toy dump trucks from Santa Claus.

I can only guess why Santa Claus (my parents) did this. They were not rigid, but also weren't flaming progressives either. I'm pretty sure they didn't have an agenda.

Perhaps they saw us playing with a truck our little brother had been given, and took the hint. Or maybe it was the fact that we had this new sandbox in the back yard, and they didn't want us taking our dolls out there. Or it could have been some other inscrutable parental mystery. Whatever it was, I remember that my sister and I were surprised and delighted. The supposedly gender-specific toy did not do us any harm.

It's a hot August day in Texas, so it's hard to think why I would be remembering a particular Christmas in Minnesota, except for the fact that the Target Corporation recently decided to remove some of its gender-based product signs and also to switch to some "gender-neutral" colors on their displays. (The color idea does lead me to wonder: where did the whole pink and blue idea come from? I can't find it anywhere in the Bible. Especially pink.)

Target's decision has been met with unexpected ferocity from those who oppose it. At the very least, I'll admit that I didn't expect it. Remember, my parents gave us DUMP TRUCKS for Christmas one year. It just never occurred to me that parents couldn't find their way to the correct toys and clothes and bedroom furniture for their children without big pink and blue signs directing them to the right places.

It is also puzzling to me that a great deal of the outrage is from Christians, who suspect a sinister agenda designed to rob us of our biblical manhood or womanhood. Now even Franklin Graham has entered the fray, declaring a boycott of Target until they get their act together and put their "boys" and "girls" signs and colors back up.

Is this what evangelical Christianity has come to? Is this what the good news is all about? Gender roles? Boys and girls staying neatly in their places? Long ago, Paul wrote to the Galatians that in Christ "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female." Long ago, he celebrated the good news that we are all children of God and heirs of eternal life, that we have, all of us, male and female, young and old, in all of our beautiful diversity, have put on Christ. Hmmmm. "Put on Christ." Is this some sort of gender-neutral wardrobe? This makes Paul sound a little subversive, like there is an identity that trumps all of our other identities, including our biblical manhood or womanhood. It is the image of God, and the image of Christ, bearing fruit in our lives. This is freedom in Christ that we are called to, and it is exhilarating, and, I'll admit, also somewhat terrifying. Maybe that is the problem. Being free is not as easy as it looks. And raising children who are free to be and become the children of God that they are—well, that's not so easy either. But we do have resources.

Instead of creating rigid boxes and pink and blue signs with stereotypes about biblical manhood and womanhood (many of which are actually cultural rather than biblical), why not revel in the incredible diversity of stories of men and women (and children) in the Bible, in all of their individual glory? Why not just hear the stories about Deborah the judge, or David the harp-playing giant killer, or Mary Magdalene, the apostle to the apostles? Why not let children imagine themselves as Miriam who danced at the other end of the Red Sea, or Joseph who told his dreams and forgave his brothers, or Peter who walked on water (for a little while, anyway)? Or why not just look at them, your children, and see who they are becoming as children of God?

It seems to me that what Target has really done for us adults is to treat us like adults. We are free to choose the toys, the clothes, for the children we know. We know their gifts. We know their fears. We have an inkling who they are becoming. We don't need color-coded signs to help them grow up, to tell them who they are, to tell them whose they are.

Do we?

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