

Galatians 3:28 -- Does It Teach Egalitarianism?

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There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one {man} in Christ Jesus. (ASV)

Concerning sonship in God's family, Paul declares equality, an equality heretofore unknown and unpracticed by those under the Law of Moses. Writing to a Jewish audience still troubled by circumcision and other tenets of the Law of Moses, Paul shows one of the great advantages of being "in Christ," a relationship he had just stated was accomplished at baptism (v. 27). The final conclusions affirmed that all persons have equal access, that those who belong to Christ have become heirs of God's great promise, and that thus they are spiritually Abraham's sons (v. 29).

Does this teach egalitarianism, i. e., "a social philosophy advocating the removal of inequalities among people"?ⁱ In the present framework of current religious discussions among brethren, egalitarianism means that women have equal rights to all religious offices, works, honors, and leadership roles as do men.ⁱⁱ

Galatians 3:28 is the "locus classicus" of feminists.

No passage has been more abused blatantly by feministsⁱⁱⁱ than this one. No passage is more crucial to their arguments than this one. Among themselves they refer to it as the "locus classicus" (main proof text).^{iv} They take this as the foundation argument which colors and overrides all other passages, especially 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Timothy 2, and 1 Peter 3. Under the guise of their arguments about Galatians 3:28, it is concluded there are no distinctions whatever in the ways men and women may function in the Lord's church or in the family. All other passages, therefore, must bow to their interpretation of this one, regardless of how plain may be certain contrary statements.

In practice this means women may teach any class a man does, preach, lead the music worship, serve as elders and deacons, etc. It also means that husbands and wives share equally in the leadership of the home and "submission" is a curse word. To these feminists submission means inequality, but they forget about the submission of Jesus Christ (John 4:34; 5:30, 36).

Four types of feminism can be distinguished: Secular (based on human theories alone), Goddess (based on a variety of neo-pagan religions where goddesses were worshipped, especially witchcraft), Liberal Christian (based on women's experience as the norm rather than the Bible since "the Bible is so patriarchal and backward in its cultural expressions"), and Biblical (based on the premise that the Bible, "correctly interpreted," teaches egalitarianism).^v One should note that only the last type accepts the Bible as

inspired in the full and conservative sense. The "Liberal Christian" wants under the umbrella of religious thought but rejects the inspiration of the Bible. The concerns of this study deal only with the last type.

Some arguments include: (1) some passages are so hard to understand that they cannot be applied to daily life, (2) "two horizons," i. e., what a passage meant then in their ancient culture and what it means today, (3) there are descriptive passages, simply describing certain actions, and prescriptive passages, requiring certain actions, and (4) the mention of the "three pairs," Jew-Greek, bond-free, male-female, reverses the "curse" of Genesis 3:16, thus all relationships in life are equal in every way.^{vi}

Are these feminists being fair and responsible in their handling of Scripture? I see passage after passage of the Word of God being twisted and distorted to fit a preconceived viewpoint. I see interpretations being confidently affirmed when there is absolutely no basis for them. I see unsubstantiated speculations subtly and without warning being transformed into established truths. I see unusual word meanings being substituted for accepted ones with little reason beyond ideological necessity. I see theologically important conclusions being based on assertions that are simply and clearly contrary to fact.^{vii}

Keep Galatians 3:28 in its context.

The language here is about salvation, not social conduct. This passage is not about how salvation affects social and sexual distinctions; rather, it is about whether social and sexual distinctions affect salvation. This passage speaks of the God's guarantee that no racial, social, or sexual distinctions will keep one from becoming an heir of salvation, promised through Abraham and perfected in Christ Jesus. It is not describing how relationships will unfold after salvation but how such distinctions are irrelevant before salvation.

Galatians 3:28, according to an astute football analogy, teaches how a person makes the team but not what position that person plays. "As individuals, we are all on God's team -- equal in importance, equal in access to God. But being a team member with equal team status doesn't mean we all play the same position."^{viii}

Paul is writing to the churches in Galatia (1:3 - such as Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) who had been invaded by Judaizing teachers proclaiming that only through the gate of Judaism could one enter correctly into Christ. Thus in chapter 1 he discusses the danger of another gospel, giving evidence of his having received the correct gospel. Then in chapter 2 he states the example of Peter and Barnabas falling back into errors of making distinctions between Jew and Gentile.

Chapter 3 shows the true inheritance with Christ comes as a result of the promise of God and is not found in keeping tenets of the Law of Moses. Chapter 4 continues the

theme of inheritance and freedom in Christ, using the allegory of Sarah and Hagar. Chapter 5 portrays the freedom found in Christ and warns them about being severed from Christ, falling away from grace.

The rest of the book (beginning in 5:13) gives practical applications in living for Christ but there is a final charge concerning the Judaizers (6:13-17). In this Paul warns them once more about "receiving circumcision" (practicing circumcision for religious reasons), and he states very positively that circumcision or uncircumcision makes no difference whatever as to a person being a true Christian. Being a true Christian depends on whether or not that person has become a "new creature" (6:15). Paul then concludes by referring to the churches of Galatia as being the true "Israel of God" (6:16). The reality of receiving the inheritance with God is found in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and not in following Moses' Law.

Keeping Galatians 3:28 leaves no room for the specious feminist assertions.

Keep Galatians 3:28 true to its purpose.

One noted contextual analyst points out that there are things this verse does not mean: (1) that all civil distinctions, such as slavery, are erased, as there were still slaves and masters; (2) that all differing functions are voided, since there remain different functions for masters and slaves and for wives and husbands; and (3) that all financial and social levels are removed in the church. ^{ix} Another states, "The conclusion which the apostle draws from all believers being thus united, and equally united with Christ Jesus, is that they are all equally secured of those blessings which flow entirely from their connection with him." ^x Additionally one shows there are "alterable political and sociable distinctions...and an unalterable one of sex" which is "an unchangeable law of our species." ^{xi}

After all, when Jews, Greeks, masters, slaves, male, and female are baptized into Christ they are still Jews, Greeks, masters, slaves, male, and female! Baptism into Christ does not change their relationship to each other, rather, it changes their relationship to God.

Martin Luther's comment on this passage stated: "For if the woman would be a man, if the son would be the father, the servant would be the master, the subject would be the magistrate, there should be nothing else but a confusion of all states and of all beings." ^{xii}

The fact that Paul used three pairs of relationships (Jew-Greek, bond-free, male-female) does not require that all such distinctions cease. In the metaphor of inheritance by sonship alone Paul gives examples of how Judaism did not allow inheritance by every person. "In the final analysis, following the terms of the Law, in ordinary circumstances only free Jewish males were heirs. The term son covers it all." ^{xiii} In Christ, however, sons

is applied equally to all, regardless of such distinctions, when they are baptized into Christ and put on Christ.

Keep some accurate conclusions in mind.

1. Differences and inequalities are still present. There are differing abilities, opportunities, talents, intelligence quotients, setbacks, tragedies, problems, and troubles. Such are not erased in Christ. Thus Galatians 3:28 does not teach egalitarianism.

2. Men and women still function differently in life. Women are still mothers, men are still the fathers. Husbands are still the leaders, wives are still the followers. The woman is to be in submission, yet is a joint-heir of life (1 Peter 3:1, 7). This, incidentally, is a good commentary as to how Galatians 3:28 should be applied in the home.

3. There are different functions in the church (1 Corinthians 14, 1 Timothy 2) with no inequality. Who would argue the song leader is more important than a woman singer?

4. Woman is in no way devalued in Christ, but given equal access to being an heir.

5. The woman was created for the man, not the man for the woman (1 Corinthians 11:9), but neither are without the other as all things are of God, vv. 11-12.

The woman was created to complete the man, not compete with the man.

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Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, (Merriam-Webster Inc., Springfield, Massachusetts, 1988), p. 398.

For further detailed discussion one may refer to Gender and Ministry, Freed-Hardeman University Preachers and Church Workers Forum 1990, (Publishers Designs, Inc., Huntsville, Alabama, 1990). Don McWhorter, Ralph Gilmore, Robert Randolph, and Lynn Mitchell discussed egalitarian arguments among brethren today.

"Feminist" in this discussion will be used to denote radical views, of which there are many varying shades. "Feminist" will be used to refer to those who hold views and promote laws for women to have equal rights socially, politically, and economically. Those under discussion will be persons desiring special discrimination for women and those who refuse to acknowledge God's design in both the family and the church.

Jack Cottrell, Gender Roles and the Bible: Creation, the Fall, and Redemption, (College Press

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John Brown, An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, (William Oliphant and Sons, Edinburgh, 1853, and reprinted by James Family Christian Publishers, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1999), p. 181.

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