

An Exegetical Study Of Galatians 3:28

"There Is No Male And Female...In Christ Jesus."

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In the discussion of woman's position in God's created order it is occasionally urged that Galatians 3:28 abrogates any distinction between male and female, nullifies the headship which man is to exercise and the submission which woman is to observe, and declares that man and woman are in every sense equal. It is the purpose of this study to examine Galatians 3:28, to see it in its narrower context with verses 26 and 27, and in the broader context of the entire Epistle to the Galatians. It will seek to determine what the passage says and what it does not say. It will call upon other writings of Paul to help determine the intention of the Holy Spirit in this verse.

The central purpose of this epistle is to reaffirm the truth that people are justified by faith rather than by works of law. In order to carry out this purpose Paul undertook, in the first two chapters of this letter, to demonstrate that he spoke and wrote with full apostolic authority. In the middle portion of the epistle, he set forth the central truth of justification by faith, chapters 3 and 4. In the last two chapters of the letter, the apostle exhorted his readers to live the implications of this truth.

Thus, the section of the letter in which the passage under discussion appears is the section on justification. Verses 26-28 of chapter 3 provide an answer, one could say a climactic answer to the questions which troubled the Galatian congregations. We summarize the issue with "justification" or "freedom from the law," but it was also expressed in other ways. Must a person submit to the Law of Moses by receiving circumcision, observing food laws, keeping the Sabbath Day in order to be a full-fledged Christian? Who are the true children of Abraham and how are they that? Who are truly the children of God and how? Who has the Spirit of God and how is he received? Who are the heirs of God's gracious promise and how do they inherit?

Paul's answer to these questions is "by faith" and "not by works." In 2:15.16 he wrote: "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners,' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified." In 3:11 he wrote: "Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, 'The righteous will live by faith.'" It is and always was "by the promise" and not "by the law," "for if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise (3:18.)

There are several verses in this letter of which one can say, "This is a summary of the epistle." Verse 26 of chapter 3 is one of those: *Pantes gar huioi theou este dia tes pistews en Christo Iesou.*

Gar relates verse 26 to the previous verse that concluded a discussion of the nature, purpose, and function of the Mosaic Law (vv. 16-25. The Law came 430 years after the covenant promises that God made to Abraham and to his Seed, who is Christ (vv. 16.17.) It did not set aside the covenant which God had made with Abraham or do away with the promise (v. 17.) If God had added the Law as the means for gaining the inheritance of his blessing, then the inheritance would no longer be something given and received by God's promise (v 18a.) But before there ever was a Mosaic Law God graciously bestowed his blessing on Abraham by promise (v.18b.) Thus the promise has precedence and the Law cannot supersede it because it is God's promise. But God did give the Law for a purpose. It was added because of transgressions. It was added to demonstrate the sinfulness of sin, to stir up the working wrath of the sinful beast in human beings and expose sinners for what they are, to give sin definition so that it could be recognized as sin (v.19a.) Thus it served an auxiliary role in the interest of the promise. In God's intention it played a temporary role until the Seed came to whom the promise referred (v. 19 a.b.) It was ordained by angels through a mediator, Moses (v. 19c.) Even this mediation, in contrast to God's direct dealing with Abraham, demonstrated that the Law was inferior to the promise (v.20.)

So, the Law was never intended as a way of salvation. Nor was it given as an appendix to the promise, a condition. God did not qualify his promise with, "But there is something you must do." It is not that the Law is against God's promises, "for if a law had been given that was able to make alive, truly justification would be by the law (v. 21.)" But the written Law included everyone and everything under sin so that believers might apprehend the promise by faith in Jesus Christ and not by works of law, even this excellent Law (vv. 21b,22.)

Paul is still referring to the situation of the Old Testament believers when he writes in verse 23, "we were held prisoners by the law." The temporary and limited and specific function of the entire Mosaic structure is reemphasized in the clauses *pro tou de elthein ten pistin* and *eis ten mellousan pistin apokaluph thenai*. Whether we understand the latter clause in a temporal or telic sense, the sentence says that the Law's function before "the faith" was revealed was the custodial confinement of Israel until the coming of Christ. In view of history and of what Paul has said about Abraham's justification by faith, it is difficult to understand *pistis* in a subjective sense. Justification by faith was not an innovation on the part of Jesus or Paul. Abraham's faith was reckoned to him for righteousness (3:6.) But now the object of Abraham's faith and Israel's faith has come, Christ. The implication is that the Mosaic Law has performed its temporary function and is now no longer in effect.

Stating it another way, with a different picture, Paul says that the Law was like a trusted slave who taught and enforced good manners and diligence in a school boy. "Thus the Law was our *paidagogos eis Christon* (v. 24a.) [Whether the *eis* is understood temporally or in a telic sense], Paul is restating the truth that the Mosaic complex performed a God-given but temporary function. This it did, not so Israel could be justified by it, but "in order that we might be justified by faith (v. 24b.)" And now that the object of our faith has come we are no longer under any *paidagogos* (v.25.)

Gar in verse 26 may be understood as either explaining or confirming the statement of verse 25. The confirmatory use seems more natural here: "Yes, in deed" or "in fact." The second person *este* marks a shift in the subject from Old Testament believers (1st person plural in vv.23-25) to New Testament believers. Its subject is *pantes*, in emphatic position. "All" allows no distinctions such as the Law made and the Judaizers were demanding. "All" are *huiou tou theou*. *Huiou* says more than *tekna* would. Believers under the restriction of the Law were God's dear children, but they had been treated like minors under guardianship who could not order their lives in responsible freedom. Now that Christ has come, believers are all treated as mature heirs. They no longer require the disciplining of the Mosaic guardian. Just as the *pantes* includes Jew and non-Jew, so the *huiou* includes men and women. *Huiou* is not a reference to gender, distinguishing sons from daughters. Rather, it includes all persons of either sex who enjoy the freedom of maturity in Christ as distinguished from the Jews' status under the Law of Moses. This will become obvious in verse 28.

Although the *pantes* [refers to Galatian Christians] includes every kind of people [Jew, non-Jew, men and women] it does not include all people. Justification is universal but it is not universally apprehended. *Pantes huiou* are defined and narrowed by *dia tes pisteos en Christo Iesou*. There is some disagreement among commentators and translators as to whether the "in Christ Jesus" modifies *pantes* (all you who are in Christ Jesus) or *pisteos* (faith in Christ Jesus.) In either understanding, the point here is that sonship with God is apprehended by faith. In the context of this epistle and of Paul's argument, that means by faith *alone* because it excludes all legal considerations or qualifications.

Paul continues: *Hosoi gar eis Christon ebaptisthete, Christon enedusasthe*. The *gar* is explanatory. Verse 27 explains the truth of the previous statement and restates it in a way that deepens the impression by stressing the objective blessing and result of baptism. *Hosoi ebaptisthete* further defines the *pantes* of verse 26. The "all" who are sons of God through faith are "as many as" have been baptized *eis Christon*. Whether *eis* is rendered "into" or "in" (for *eis* and *en* were becoming synonymous in Hellenistic Greek) does not affect the objective truth that the baptized have "put on Christ." Whether we understand the *eis* as "into union with" or "in the sphere of" Christ, the blessed truth is that in baptism we have "put on Christ."

The middle aorist second plural *enedusasthe* expresses the truth that the baptized are in fact clothed in Christ. They do not wear the garb of slaves, minors, foreigners, or inferior people. They "wear" the Son of God

and God regards them in that garb as his *huioi*. To put on Christ as a garment does not mean to imitate him. Rather it means to be seen as he is seen: holy, righteous, acceptable to God and beloved by the Father. The picture is evocative of (if not directly borrowed from) Isaiah 61:10.

"I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with jewels."

In verse 27, in the context of this epistle, "You have put on Christ" really means, "You are justified."

Verse 28 does not have a connective or resumptive particle, but it is obviously related to and dependent upon the statements that precede it. It restates the truths of verses 26 and 27 as verse 27 had restated the truth of verse 26. It does so by drawing the practical conclusion: *ouk eni Ioudaios oude Hellen, ouk eni doulos oude eleutheros, ouk eni arsen kai thelu: pantes gar humeis heis este en Christo Iesou*. The modern grammars and lexica are generally agreed that *eni* is an abbreviated form of *enestin*, accent on the first syllable, not used as a copulative but to denote existence: "there is." The preposition *en* that is still there finds its object at the end of the sentence in *Christo Iesou*. We could translate: "In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Now, Paul is not dreaming of an ideal state or setting forth ethical demands. He is stating a fact. He is not saying that there should be no more racial or national distinctions in the world, no more slave-master relationships, no more recognition that God created male and female. He *is* saying that as God regards baptized believers in Christ Jesus, all have the status of *huioi*. All are children of Abraham. All are justified. Where the Mosaic Law made distinctions for disciplinary and tutelary purposes, the Gospel declares that in Christ those distinctions do not exist. He supports and explains his statement with *pantes gar humeis heis este en Christo Iesou*. In Christ Jesus you are all one. Those who are included in the *pantes* of verse 26 and the *hosoi* of verse 27 are not diverse and divided. They are no longer under the Law that emphasized and enforced divisions. They are *heis*, one person in Christ. That is how God regards them. Not law, not works, not ancestral claims; but baptism and faith and Christ Jesus have constituted them as one. It is not simply *hen*, one entity, but *heis*, one person. "It is as if it were always the same person reappearing before him (Burton.)"

There was a Jewish prayer that said: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast not made me a heathen..., a bondman..., a woman." Paul's statement here follows the outline of that prayer but, in contrast to it, concludes that God's blessing of salvation rests on Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female without distinction in Christ Jesus. Under the Mosaic Law circumcision was the visible sign of difference between Jew and Greek. It was imposed on slave by master. It was intended for males but not for females. But baptism and faith do not exclude or divide according to those categories or stations in life. All are one in Christ Jesus. The Mosaic Law excluded women from the priesthood, but in Christ Jesus all believers are priests (Rev 1:6.) In fact, the Church does not *have* a priesthood; it *is* a priesthood (1 Pe 2:9), and all its members join in showing forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

What this passage is saying has been neatly summarized by Luther in the 1535 lectures: "For *in Christ Jesus all social stations*, even those that were divinely ordained, *are nothing*. Male, female, slave, free, Jew, Gentile, king, subject -- these are, of course, good creatures of God. But in Christ, that is, in the matter of salvation, they amount to nothing, for all their wisdom, righteousness, devotion, and authority." (emphasis added.)

Before going on to discuss what this passage does not say, let us review what it does say. It says that by faith, through baptism, in Christ Jesus

- all are free, mature children of God;
- all share in the blessings and prerogatives of mature children;
- all preferential standing in the fellowship of believers is done away with;

- all hindrance to fellowship is removed;
- all, without loss of individuality or personality or identity, are regarded as one person in God's sight;
- all are Abraham's seed according to the promise because of their connection with Abraham's Seed, who is Christ (cf. 3:16,29.).

There are some inferences that may be drawn regarding relationships of Christian to Christian, and Christian to fellow human being. Without expressing a moral injunction or issuing an ethical demand, the words of verse 28 would make a Christian uncomfortable with any racist or sexist attitudes which he or she might harbor. The words could give a slave owner pause, and history bears out that a fruit of the Gospel has often been the manumission of slaves by Christian masters or through the efforts of the Christian congregation.

But, to summarize at the beginning what this verse does not do, it does not

- deny racial and national differences which simply exist
- abolish slavery as a social and economic institution
- abrogate the respective roles which God has assigned to the sexes when he created them *arsen kai thelu*.

Paul's later writings certainly make this clear. What he says here in this early (or earliest) letter could not be understood as emending or contradicting what he wrote in later letters. Not only chronology but the unity of Scripture preclude that understanding of his words.

In Colossians 3, for example, Paul says that in "the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator..., there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all (vv., 10,11.)" In verses 8 and 9a he had exhorted his readers to sanctified living. In verse 9b he bases that exhortation on the fact of their justification and connects it with their progressive (*anakainoumenon*) sanctification. The motive which he adds at the end of verse 11, that "Christ is all and in all" should make it impossible for them to deal decently and honestly with a Christian who comes from "their own kind" while mistreating a fellow believer who is "the other kind." Christ is in all of them and I must love them all alike. This passage does not obliterate nationality or undo circumcision. It does not make cultured gentlefolk out of barbarians and Scythians. It does not free slaves. What it does do is declare all such distinctions irrelevant in Christian relationships because they are irrelevant in God's sight. His teaching here is in contradiction to the gnosticizing Judaizers who set conditions and imposed rules and defined an elite Christianity on their own terms (cf. Col 2:8-23.)

It is striking that in verses 18 and 19 of Colossians 3 Paul enjoins wives and husbands to live according to God's original intention, and to do so "in the Lord." "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them." It is obvious here that Paul does not think of the wife's submission as the result of sin, a submission that has been abrogated by the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus. In verse 22 of the same chapter he enjoins slaves to obey their masters and in 4:1 he enjoins masters to deal fairly with their slaves. He writes these things in agreement with, not in contradiction of, his words in Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11 (Cp. also 1 Co 7:17-24; Eph 6:5; 1 Ti 6:1; Tit 2:9; Phm).

That the order of creation, the law in the sense of God's immutable holy will has not been abrogated and still speaks with moral authority even to those who are in Christ Jesus is evident in Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12f. The former enjoins: "Let (the women) be in submission, *as the law says* (emphasis added.)" The latter says: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man," and Paul cites the order of creation to support this prohibition: "For Adam was first created, then Eve."

We conclude, therefore, that in Galatians 3:28 Paul was not abrogating the order of creation which he affirmed in later writings. The immutable holy will of God cannot be set aside in the way the later, temporary, and auxiliary Mosaic Law was set aside after it had fulfilled its task. Justification by faith, through baptism, in Christ Jesus effects a new and marvelous status before God. It does not obliterate a distinction that exists, as part of his expressed will for the human race. It does not abrogate a relationship between man and woman that his free, mature children are now able to observe and value in a way that unbelievers cannot really appreciate.