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Distinction and Function in the Church: Reading Galatians 3:28 in Context

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For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer *male and female*;
for *all of you are one* in Christ Jesus.

And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Gal. 3:26-29)¹

The current Evangelical debate over women in ministry leadership often swirls around different understandings of the meaning and significance of Galatians 3:28. Egalitarians firmly ground their affirmation of the equality of men and women on Paul's statement that "there is no longer male and female," despite the absence of any specific reference to "equality" in the passage. Complementarians, on the other hand, dismiss this passage as irrelevant to the discussion of women's leadership in the church because of a supposed distinction between believers' equal status in salvation and their roles or function within the church.²

A careful reading of Galatians 3:28 within the context of Galatians and in relation to New Testament texts with similar themes suggests different conclusions than are often proposed by either egalitarians or complementarians in the current debate over women in church leadership.

This impasse arises, in part, because of the relative brevity and apparent ambiguity of the reference, "no longer male and female." Interpretive cues for identifying the meaning and significance of this

phrase for contemporary church practice appear to be minimal. The danger, when reading an apparently ambiguous passage, is the tendency to fill in gaps of understanding, either with what makes sense to us within our own cultural setting, or with what reflects a presupposed interpretive grid that is then imposed upon the text.³ These assumptions often prove difficult to discern within a shared interpretive framework. The question facing us is whether the meaning of Galatians 3:28 can be better understood when read within the larger context of the New Testament.⁴ A careful reading of Galatians 3:28 within the context of the whole letter and in comparison to related passages in the New Testament reveals a much clearer picture than the current standoff in the Evangelical debate would suggest.

HELLENISTIC AND JEWISH SAYINGS

Galatians 3:28 contains a negation of three categories that reflected common ways of distinguishing humanity among both Greeks and Jews.⁵ A comparable saying was attributed to several Greek philosophers: “that I was born a human being, not a beast; a man and not a woman; thirdly, a Greek and not barbarian.”⁶ A similar expression of gratitude was also part of the Jewish cycle of morning prayers: “Blessed be He that He did not make me a Gentile; blessed be He that He did not make me a boor [i.e., an ignorant peasant or a slave]; blessed be He that He did not make me a woman.”⁷

The recognition of distinctions within humanity was also stated positively within Rabbinic Judaism: “If a poor man says anything, one pays little regard: but if a rich man speaks, immediately he is heard and listened to. Before God, however, all are equal: women, slaves, poor, and rich.”⁸ It is likely that Paul’s three couplets (Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female) also recognized this common way of perceiving the division of humanity.

READING GALATIANS 3:28 WITHIN THE LETTER OF GALATIANS

Despite similarities with sayings found in the larger cultural setting, Galatians 3:28 must first be situated within the context of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Paul begins his letter abruptly by expressing his astonishment at the Galatians’ sudden desertion of God (the Spirit) and turning toward a different gospel (Gal. 1:6-7). This perversion of the gospel of Christ was reflected in actions inconsistent with the truth of

the gospel, such as Peter's hypocrisy when he refused to eat with Gentiles.⁹ Justification through faith must not be undermined by actions that suggest that God's grace comes through doing the works of the law (Gal. 2:18-21).

At the heart of Paul's argument is his recognition of the presence of the Spirit in the Galatians' lives through faith: "The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?" (Gal. 3:2). In response, Paul argues that God's promise of righteousness to Abraham is available as an inheritance to the Gentiles by faith through the promised Spirit (Gal. 3:14). In the immediate context, Paul notes that in relation to the promises of God, the law functioned as a *guardian* until faith through Jesus Christ was revealed (Gal. 3:22). The chiasmic structure of Galatians 3:26-29 (see above) frames 3:28 as the practical consequence of sharing in God's promise in Christ.¹⁰

The contrast is not between being in Christ and the law as a means of salvation, but between being in Christ and subjection to the law as a guardian (Gal. 3:23-25). A new relationship with the law is envisioned in Christ with the adoption of the Gentiles as Abraham's offspring, which is then confirmed by the presence of God's Spirit (Gal. 4:5-6). As heirs of God, Jews and Gentiles need no longer be enslaved to the rituals and practices that reflect the works of the law (Gal. 4:9-10; 5:1). In the larger flow of the argument in Galatians 3-4, Galatians 3:26-29 provides a succinct summary regarding the effects of the blessing of Abraham and the promise of the Spirit for all people in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:26, 29 with 3:14 and 4:6-7).

The heart of Paul's argument in Galatians is not limited to the progression of salvation-history that is somehow disconnected from how the Galatians are to live together.¹¹ Rather the Galatians should live in the freedom of Christ, not for the purpose of self-indulgence, but in order to fulfill the law through love for one another (Gal. 5:13-14). Paul concludes by calling on the Galatians to live by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), be led by the Spirit (5:18), demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23), and be guided by the Spirit (5:25). Paul's overarching concern is that the promise of God's Spirit requires consistency between the message of the gospel and how that is reflected in concrete relationships between Jews and Gentiles in Christ. Paul is arguing for the full inclusion of Gentiles within the people of God.¹² The presence of the Spirit has practical

implications for how believers are to live together within the body of Christ (Gal. 6:1-5).

READING GALATIANS 3:28 WITHIN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The literary context for Galatians 3:28 also extends beyond the book of Galatians. Several New Testament texts reflect fascinating connections.

Baptized into Christ

First, the reference to being “baptized into Christ” as a description of becoming children of God through faith in Galatians 3:27 parallels 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 where all believers are “baptized into one body.” The identification of “one body” with “in Christ” affirms that all members in the body are one and highlights the significance of the Spirit in the incorporation process.¹³ Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 12 that since all believers have been baptized by one Spirit into one body, each one has been gifted by the Spirit to fulfill a function in the church (1 Cor. 12:12-13). We find a similar list of pairs in 1 Corinthians 12:13 as are found in Galatians 3:28 (except for “male and female”). Note that Paul makes no distinction regarding the differences between “Jews or Greeks” and “slaves or free” in relation to the Spirit’s gifting (cf. 1 Cor. 12:11).

Clothed with Christ

The reference to being “clothed” with Christ in Galatians 3:27 is also found in Colossians 3:9-11 where believers have “put off” the “old person” and “put on” the “new person.”¹⁴ In the Colossians context, we again find a list similar to Galatians 3:28 with some additional categories (circumcised, uncircumcised, barbarian, and Scythian). It is evident from Paul’s continued instruction (Col. 3:12-17) that putting on this “new person” is connected with ethical character (compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience), relationships within the body (bear with one another, forgiveness, and love), *and* function within the church (teaching, admonition, and worship).

Pouring Out of the Spirit

In light of Paul’s purpose in Galatians to address the relationship between Jews and Gentiles within the church, the other two pairs (slave and free; male and female) appear out of place. While the broader

cultural setting (as noted above) may provide an explanation for their inclusion in this context, Paul's emphasis on the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14) could point to another source: Joel 2:28-29.¹⁵

. . . this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:
 "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and *your sons and your daughters* shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my *slaves, both men and women*, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. . . ." (Acts 2:16-18, citing Joel 2:28-29)

Jesus (Acts 1:4-5), Peter (Acts 11:16), and Paul (1 Cor. 12:13) all identify the coming of the promised Spirit with the baptism of the Spirit, thus suggesting a possible allusion to the Spirit behind the reference to baptism in Galatians 3:27. Paul may have linked what was his primary concern in the context of his letter to the Galatians (Jew/Gentile relationships) with Joel's reference to "sons and daughters" and "slaves, both male and female."¹⁶

Paul's later quotation of Joel 2:32 in the context of his discussion of Jew/Gentile relationships in Romans 10:12-13 highlights his awareness of Joel 2:28-29 as a backdrop for the removal of distinctions between Jews and Gentiles. The significance of Peter's quotation of Joel at the formation of the church with the coming of the promised Spirit at Pentecost may not have been lost on Paul. While speculative, perhaps Paul's confrontation with Peter in Galatia heightened his awareness of the need to see the fulfillment of Peter's own Pentecost sermon.¹⁷ The negation of the distinction between Jews and Gentiles in Galatians 3:28 may be a concrete application of this initial vision for the formation of the church.

One in Christ

The emphasis in Galatians 3:26-29 is that Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, and males and females are all "one in Christ Jesus" because all are children of God through faith. Rather than proclaiming each set as equal, Paul asserts that they are "one."¹⁸ The use of the singular masculine grammatical form of "one" is clearly connected to both Jews and Gentiles being "one in Christ."¹⁹ What does this reference to "one" refer to or modify?

In a similar way, Ephesians 2:11-22 identifies the reconciliation of Jews (“the circumcision”) and Gentiles (“the uncircumcision”) in the body of Christ with the creation of one new person (literally: “man”) out of the two. Christ’s abolishment of the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles has reconciled both groups into “one body” (Eph. 2:14).²⁰ The identification of “one person” with “one body” suggests that the use of the singular masculine form of “one” in Galatians 3:29 may also refer to the body of Christ. This implies that Paul’s point in Galatians 3:28 is to identify all believers with “one person” (Christ) or “one body.”²¹

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NO DISTINCTION

Interestingly, Paul uses a different Greek conjunction with the male/female couplet than the other pairs, although not all translations reflect this difference. The use of *and* instead of *or* may reflect the wording of Genesis 1:27: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” While Paul does not explain the significance of this quotation, the reference appears to envision a negation of the distinction expressed in the original sexual differentiation of humanity.²² What did Paul mean?

Differences “Do Not Count”

A common misunderstanding is to suppose that the negation of distinctions should be equated with the removal of differences, which then results in an undifferentiated humanity. Instead, Paul argues vehemently that the differences between Jews and Greeks must *not* be removed within the church: “Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you” (Gal. 5:2). Instead of the erasure of differences, Paul explicitly states that the negation of Jew and Gentile in Christ means that the distinction between circumcision and uncircumcision “counts for nothing” or “is nothing” (Gal. 5:6; 6:15; 1 Cor. 7:19).²³ Differences remain, but they do not count within the body of Christ.

Since both circumcision and uncircumcision are irrelevant conditions for entry into the body of Christ, these distinctions should also not stand in the way of Jews and Gentiles relating to one another in the church.²⁴ In each instance, a positive statement about life within the body of Christ is contrasted with the distinctions between circumcision and uncircumcision. What really counts is “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6), a “new creation” (Gal. 6:15), and “obeying the

commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19).

It is significant to note that in the midst of discussing the relationship between men and women in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul also appeals to the examples of circumcision and slavery as support for his argument that believers should remain in the condition where they are.²⁵ Paul’s rule is now applied to both Jews and Gentiles: “Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision” (1 Cor. 7:18).

Similarly, slaves were not to be concerned about their position of slavery nor were free people to become slaves, for “in the Lord” these categories are irrelevant. This is because “a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ” (1 Cor. 7:22).²⁶ Again, Paul does not seek to erase differences between people, but instead to emphasize that these differences are irrelevant and do not count within the body of Christ.²⁷

God Is Impartial

Elsewhere, Paul clearly states, “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek” (Rom. 10:12). What underlies this assertion is Paul’s recognition that “God shows no partiality” (Rom. 2:11; cf. 10:11-13).²⁸ Interestingly, we find this same connection between showing no distinction and God’s impartiality in Luke’s description of Peter’s encounter with Cornelius when he was persuaded to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:24, 38; cf. 11:9-12). The appeal to impartiality is also made in the context of slaves and free, where both are called to relate to one another on the basis of God’s attitude (Eph. 6:8-9; cf. Col. 3:23-25).

The demonstration of partiality carries an unfavorable meaning, “whereby the acceptance or esteem expressed in ‘receiving the face’ is unwarranted, an act of uncalled-for favor (i.e., favoritism).”²⁹ God’s impartiality is not limited to the question of who can be saved. Rather, God is portrayed as the model of impartiality, which has implications for how believers are to relate to one another without distinction in the body of Christ.

FUNCTION IN THE NEW CREATION

The radical negation of distinctions within the body of Christ is

described as a “new creation” (Gal. 6:15). While this contrast with the original creation has already been alluded to in Galatians 3:28 (as well as in Eph. 2:15-16; 4:24; and Col. 3:10), it is in 2 Corinthians 5 that Paul explicitly identifies those in Christ with this new creation. This new creation does not refer to an alteration in the physical nature of believers, nor an inward individual change at the level of what it means to be human, but rather to the renewed people of God.³⁰ God’s new creation is the body of Christ, which must no longer be perceived from a human point of view (2 Cor. 5:16-18).

Are there any implications arising from Galatians 3:28 regarding the question of function within the church? If the point of Galatians 3:28 is that individuals characterized by each of the couplets are all one and therefore all part of the body of Christ, then Paul’s conclusion that these differences do not count for anything would be relevant for how believers function within that body. In 1 Corinthians 12, the various functions within the body of Christ are a reflection of the Spirit’s gifting of its members for the purpose of building up one another. Diversity of function among the members is expected because of the complementary nature of the various parts of the body. Unity within the body is a result of a common source (the Spirit) behind the various functions (1 Cor. 12:4-7, 11).

Can a distinction be made between the groups of people listed in Galatians 3:28 regarding their function within the body of Christ? If the Spirit is the one who distributes the gifts as he chooses within the body of Christ, would these gifts be allotted differently to Jews and Gentiles? Did the New Testament church recognize a limitation of the Spirit’s gifts because of a person’s enslavement? Paul’s writings give no indication that certain gifts are restricted from one group or another on the basis of the distinctions listed in Galatians 3:28.³¹ This is consistent with Peter’s interpretation of the outpouring of the Spirit at the time of the formation of the church at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-18). The emerging connection between the Spirit’s gifting and positions in the church (i.e., overseer, deacon, elder) is presented in the New Testament as the church’s way of recognizing “regularly exercised Spirit-initiated ministries.”³²

The distinction between believers’ status in Christ and their function in the church cannot be framed as mutually exclusive categories. Believers’ functions within the church are integrally related

to their conversion or entry into the body of Christ. The Spirit is involved in believers' salvation through the washing away of sin and also in their ministry in the church through the appropriation of spiritual gifts. Similarly, believers are saved by God's grace through faith, yet they are also held accountable to be stewards of God's grace as expressed in the gifts they have been given.

While we recognize that status and function are not identical, we cannot conclude that our status in Christ through salvation has no implications for our function within his body. In sum, just as the New Testament writers recognize the significant role of both the Spirit and grace in salvation (2 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:8), so they also identify both the Spirit and grace as determinant for identifying believers' functions within the church (1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:7; Rom. 12:6; 1 Pet. 4:10).

CONCLUSION

A careful reading of Galatians 3:28 within the context of Galatians and in relation to New Testament texts with similar themes suggests different conclusions than are often proposed by either egalitarians or complementarians in the current debate over women in church leadership. Paul's primary concern in Galatians is with the relationship between Jews and Gentiles; however, the parallel structure of the three pairs in Galatians 3:28 suggests that they should be read together.³³ The principles Paul used to address the distinction between Jews and Gentiles can also be applied to slaves and free *and* to males and females. Furthermore, the context for interpreting Galatians 3:28 extends beyond the book of Galatians, indicating that it is embedded in a larger theological framework which enhances our understanding of its meaning and significance.

On one hand, we must acknowledge that the assertion that Galatians 3:28 specifically proclaims the *equality* of men and women likely imposes a foreign category onto the text in the guise of contemporary language and values. Paul's point is that believers are "one" in Christ, not that they are equal. It is difficult to discern whether the New Testament church in practice actually recognized the equal worth or even equal authority of masters and slaves (Eph. 5:5-9).³⁴ While the use of the term *equality* may be a helpful description for us today, we must also recognize that when it is read back onto the text, it may involve entailments that do not necessarily reflect the first century setting.

On the other hand, we must also acknowledge that any attempt to relegate Galatians 3:28 to the sidelines in the discussion of women's leadership in the church fails to understand its relation to the larger New Testament context. The claim that Galatians 3:28 only speaks to the issue of equal status in salvation does not fit with the flow of Paul's argument in Galatians regarding the role of the Spirit. The contrast between the negated couplets and being one in Christ identifies the body of Christ as the context for addressing distinctions that are commonly used to divide people in society. The significance of this identification is that distinctions between Jew/Gentile, slave/free, and male/female do not count for anything within the body of Christ. The analogous relationship of these three pairs implies that even the reality of inequality between masters and slaves reflected in a clear differentiation of authority does not count within the church.³⁵

While differences between these pairs are not to be erased, making distinctions based on these differences shows favoritism, which does not reflect God's impartiality. The creation of a "new person" (the body of Christ) that could incorporate all of humanity requires a new way of relating together within the church. Function within the body is an outcome of the Spirit's gifting based on *his* choosing, which is not limited by the distinctions negated in Galatians 3:28. Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, and males and females are all full members *and* participants in the body of Christ.

Galatians 3:28 is so intricately woven into the fabric of Paul's epistles that its meaning and significance cannot be detached from the larger tapestry of the New Testament. When Galatians 3:28 is read against the backdrop of the New Testament, an integrated picture of the implications of the gospel becomes apparent. To dismiss the relevance of Galatians 3:28 in the discussion of function within the body of Christ is tantamount to suggesting that our salvation in Christ has no implications for how we are to live together within the church.

NOTES

1. Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version with *emph.* added, as also with the following.
2. In particular see, Richard Hove, *Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999) and *idem*, "Does Galatians 3:28 Negate Gender-Specific Roles?" *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), 105-43. See also, H. Wayne House, "Neither . . . Male nor Female . . . in Christ Jesus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145, no. 577 (1988): 47-56;

- S. Lewis Johnson Jr., “Role Distinctions in the Church: Galatians 3:28,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 154-64; Robert Saucy, “The ‘Order’ and ‘Equality’ of Galatians 3:28,” in *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective*, ed. Robert L. Saucy and Judith K. Tenelshof (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2001), 137-59; and Peter R. Schemm Jr., “Galatians 3:28—Proof-text or Context?” *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 8, no. 1 (2003): 23-30.
3. Hays and Duvall refer to this as the interpretive reflex. See J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 90.
 4. John Howard Yoder notes that this approach, “which requires more patience, is simply to go back yet again to the text, to read it again, still more modestly.” See John Howard Yoder, *To Hear the Word* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 9-10.
 5. Each of the pairs encompasses all of humanity, thus emphasizing their similarity as inclusive categories. See Klyne R. Snodgrass, “Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution?” in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 174.
 6. This saying was attributed to Thales, Socrates, and Plato. See Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 157.
 7. *Ibid.*
 8. Ben Witherington III, “Rite and Rights for Women—Galatians 3:28,” *New Testament Studies* 27:5 (1981): 593.
 9. Hove’s description of Peter’s refusal to eat with Gentiles as an issue of “table manners” or “table etiquette” minimizes the significance of Jewish refusal to fellowship with Gentiles. See Hove, “Does Galatians 3:28 Negate Gender-Specific Roles?” 108-9.
 10. John E. Toews, in personal correspondence, pointed out the significance of the chiasmic structure.
 11. Contra Hove, *Equality in Christ?* 35. Hove’s analysis ignores the continuation of Paul’s argument in Galatians 5—6 as well as the recurring emphasis on the Spirit throughout.
 12. Gordon Fee, “Male and Female in the New Creation: Galatians 3:26-29,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 174.
 13. See Debbie Hunn, “The Baptism of Galatians 3:27: A Contextual Approach,” *Expository Times* 115:11 (2004): 372-75. Hunn argues that in the context of Galatians, the reference to baptism is to the baptism of the Spirit.
 14. In light of Rom. 13:14, where Paul calls on believers to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” the NRSV’s translation (“the new self”) incorrectly interprets this individualistically rather than as a reference to the person of Christ. Likewise in Eph. 4:22-24 there is reference to the “new person” (literally: “new man”) which is “created according to the likeness of God.”
 15. Hove suggests both Joel 2 and Jer. 31 serve as similar passages that

- emphasize inclusion without distinction. See Hove, *Equality in Christ?* 81-83. See also Snodgrass, "Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution?" 175.
16. Another possibility would recognize Gal. 3:28 to be a pre-Pauline baptismal formulation. See Longenecker, *Galatians*, 157.
 17. This connection was suggested by my colleague, Randy Klassen.
 18. For a discussion of lexical possibilities for "one," see Hove, *Equality in Christ?* 70-71.
 19. Hove concludes that the use of "one" refers to the diverse groups sharing something in common, although the specifics of what that entails remains unclear. See Hove, *Equality in Christ?* 76.
 20. See also Bruce W. Fong, "Addressing the Issue of Racial Reconciliation According to the Principles of Eph. 2:11-22," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no. 4 (1995): 565-80.
 21. Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Christ and Gender: A Study of Difference and Equality in Gal. 3:28," in *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift: Studien zur Hermeneutik des Evangeliums*, ed. Christof Landmesser, Hans-Joachim Eckstein, and Hermann Lichtenberger (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 470. See also James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 207.
 22. See Wayne Litke, "Beyond Creation: Galatians 3:28, Genesis and the Hermaphrodite Myth," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 24, no. 2 (1995): 178.
 23. Gundry-Volf, "Christ and Gender," 454. It is surprising that Hove did not recognize the significance of Gal. 5:6 and 6:15 as a commentary on 3:28.
 24. Gundry-Volf recognizes, "Paul *cannot* erase either Jewish or Greek difference if he is to be consistent with his own denial of the significance of such difference as excluding or including from membership in the eschatological people of God." See "Christ and Gender," 456.
 25. Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Male and Female in Creation and New Creation: Interpretations of Galatians 3:28c in 1 Corinthians 7," in *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honor of Robert H. Gundry*, ed. Thomas E. Schmidt and Moisés Silva (Sheffield, England: Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 1994), 97. Gundry-Volf suggests that since "there is no evidence that circumcision or slavery was under debate in Corinth," these parallels point to Galatians 3:28 as a framework for this discussion. See also F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 188.
 26. For further hermeneutical reflection regarding slavery in light of Gal. 3:28 see Kevin Giles, "The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (1994): 3-17; Guenther Haas, "The Kingdom and Slavery: A Test Case for Social Ethics," *Calvin Theological Journal* 28, no. 1 (1993): 74-89; Wayne A. Meeks, "The 'Haustafeln' and American Slavery: A Hermeneutical Challenge," in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters*, ed. E. Lovering and J. Sumney (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 232-53; Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1983); David L. Thompson, "Women, Men, Slaves and the Bible: Hermeneutical Inquiries," *Christian Scholar's Review* 25, no. 3 (1996): 326-49; and William Webb, "A

- Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: The Slavery Analogy,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 382-400.
27. It should be noted that Paul did have Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3), although the concern seems to be a sensitivity to the witness of Timothy in a particular situation.
 28. See also Rom. 3:22. As highlighted above, Paul quotes Joel 2:32 in the context of the discussion of no distinction between Jew and Gentile.
 29. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 89.
 30. Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 23.
 31. For example, see Doug Heidebrecht, “Reading 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Its Literary Context,” *Direction* 33 (fall 2004): 171-84.
 32. Kevin Giles, *Patterns of Ministry Among the First Christians* (Melbourne, Australia: Collins Dove, 1989), 19.
 33. Gundry-Volf, “Christ and Gender,” 451. See also Stephen D. Lowe, “Rethinking the Female Status/Function Question: The Jew/Gentile Relationship as Paradigm,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 1 (1991): 59-75.
 34. It is unclear whether slaves would have been allowed to be overseers in the New Testament church. The question remains, if Galatians 3:28 is about equality, what is meant when these three pairs are defined as equal? Equal in what way? This line of reasoning pulls us outside of the text. For example, Hove’s discussion of the significance of equality appeals to current philosophical reflection for support. See Hove, *Equality in Christ?* 113-15.
 35. Tim Geddert, in personal correspondence, suggested that even if one were to consider slave and free to be an appropriate first-century mirror for female/male relationships (and even if one were to do so today), “*even then* there should be no distinction.”

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