

Galatians 3:26-29 serves as the basis for 3:23-25.

3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

3:27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

In the Bible, baptism is the proof or evidence of salvation and it is assumed to be part of every Christian's experience. "[The early church] could not conceive of a true Christian who was not willing to express commitment to our Lord [through baptism]. That was not one of the options given to the person being evangelized. He either trusted in Christ and was baptized, knowing the implications in terms of commitment and lifestyle, or he rejected the truth" (GTJ Vol. 2/2; 1981, p. 288). "Baptism was the appointed mode of professing faith in Christ, as avowing allegiance to Him as the Son of God . . . Those, therefore, who were baptized, were assumed to believe what they professed, and to be what they declared themselves to be" (Hodge, 194). In other words, "in New Testament times, baptism and belief are so closely associated that they are considered as a single act. Belief was the inward reality expressed outwardly in baptism" (Walter W. Wessel, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, VIII, 790). Although *theologically* belief precedes baptism, in *practice* these were so closely tied together that they were viewed together. Thus Paul is *not* saying to clothe ourselves with Christ *by* being baptized. Rather, he is reminding the readers that baptism *symbolized* the spiritual reality of being united with Christ.

It could also be mentioned that Paul does not say that baptism replaces circumcision as an initiation rite into the covenant community (as some reformed churches believe). If baptism replaced circumcision, Paul would have surely pointed it out here, for it would have settled the debate about circumcision decisively.

3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

3:29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

The major issue that Paul is addressing in Chapter 3 is in regards to who belongs to the family of Abraham. Who are his true offspring? The answer is, "if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." Neither ethnicity, social standing, nor gender determine whether one is a child of God; *all* who have faith in Christ are united in Him.

In the NT the emphasis moves from the physical seed of Abraham to the seed that actually inherits the promise, namely those who follow the pattern of Abraham's faith. "If Abraham were merely the father of Israel, we would have to conclude that the gentiles, who are now part of his seed are therefore a part of Israel. But according to the NT, Abraham is more than that; he is portrayed as the father of both the people of Israel and of the Gentiles" (Ro. 4:9-12; cfv.16) (Saucy, 50).

NOTE: The following are excerpts from a paper written by S. Lewis Johnson. The full document is available at <https://bible.org/seriespage/role-distinctions-church-galatians-328> or at <http://cbmw.org/uncategorized/galatians-328-proof-text-or-context-2/>

He states:

Never could the Apostle Paul have envisioned the place of Galatians 3:28 in contemporary evangelical literature. The issues of sexual equality and societal roles in modern society, however, have done what Paul could not have imagined. In fact, the text has taken on a large and, for some, a crucial place in the discussion of the roles of the sexes in the Church of Jesus Christ. While traditionally commentators have discussed Paul's words in the context of the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith, that has become a secondary matter. One can understand this to some extent, since the vigorous debate over sex roles has, in effect, lifted it from its exegetical underpinnings and set it as a lonely text, a kind of proof text, in the midst of swirling theological debate. This is not without justification, but it also is not without peril. I am referring to the human tendency to forget sound hermeneutics and find things that are not really in the text. . .

Paul King Jewett, professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, in a well-written, careful, and scholarly book, begins his discussion of the text by entitling it, "The Magna Carta of Humanity." Jewett does not believe that Paul fully implemented his "magnificent affirmation," but at least he made a beginning in carrying it out by advancing beyond the rabbis and associating with women in his work. In this Paul Jewett is not as bold as Robert Jewett, who speaks of the text as providing grounds for a Pauline breakthrough. He entitles a paper regarding the text, "The Sexual Liberation of the Apostle Paul."

Both sides of the debate have admitted that Galatians 3:28 has not always been handled well. Klyne R. Snodgrass, in his significant article, has said, "This text, like some others, has become a hermeneutical skeleton key by which we may go through any door we choose. More often than not, Galatians 3:28 has become a piece of plastic that people have molded to their preconceived ideas." James B. Hurley, holding a different view of the text, agrees, contending that much of the debate has arisen over "an abuse of Galatians 3:28."

The Exegetical Analysis

Verse twenty-six, beginning with its explanatory "for" (see nasb; niv leaves this out) justifies the new status. The apostle writes, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (nasb). The children have attained their majority and are sons, freemen of God, through a faith that has brought them into union with Christ. The second person plural of the subject, "you are," with the modifying adjective, "all," underlines the participation of the Galatians in the new status. The universal privilege of sonship in the present age through union with Christ is Paul's point, and it sets the tone of the context for interpreting verse twenty-eight. Paul's emphasis is on spiritual status in Christ, "the spiritual privilege of being the sons of God."

In verse twenty-seven Paul continues his exposition, explaining how the relation of sonship came into being. He writes, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed

yourselves with Christ” (nasb). “For” declares that through baptism, a unifying incorporation into Him, the Galatians have put on Christ (cf. Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

Verse twenty-eight points to a second issue of the universal sonship of believers: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (nasb). The human distinctions of race, social rank, and sex are in some sense nullified in Christ. The crucial question is: In what sense? Betz contends, “There can be no doubt that Paul’s statements have social and political implications of even a revolutionary dimension.” When a New Testament exegete uses the expression, “There can be no doubt,” it often is a flag to the exegetical community that there is very good reason to doubt the statement. Let us see if that is true here.

The three antitheses are chosen with a view to fundamental distinctions in ancient society. In fact, as often noted, the apostle seems to have in mind the morning prayer of Jewish men, which can be traced back as far as about a.d. 150, in which the men thanked God that they were not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. . . .

The three distinctions, important for Jewish life, are declared by Paul to be invalid in Christ. The first distinction, that between Jew and Greek, should be understood in a religious sense primarily, centering in the Abrahamic Covenant’s rite of circumcision. Without circumcision a Gentile could not inherit the promises, being spiritually depraved and lost, without God in the world (cf. Ephesians 2:11-13), but now by the blood of the Messiah the Gentiles have been brought nigh by sovereign pardoning grace and have become heirs of the Abrahamic promises. It is, of course, quite clear from the apostle’s literature that the national distinction between Israel and the Gentiles still exists both in the world (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:32) and in the believing community (cf. Romans 9:1-36; 11:1ff; Galatians 6:16). In Christ, however, both are heirs of the promised blessings, as Paul has indicated already (cf. 3:14) and will underline shortly (verse 29).

The second antithesis touches the inferiority of slaves, so marked in the ancient world and in Israelitish society. For Paul a Christian slave, too, inherits the promises equally, being “the Lord’s freedman” (1 Corinthians 7:22). The Epistle to Philemon provides a vivid illustration of this (Philemon 8-20; cf. Colossians 4:9), and also in principle provides just grounds for the abolition of slavery itself. Yet here again, the distinction of slave and freedman still existed within the church (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:17-24). In fact, the vast majority of the New Testament commentators have taken the position that the apostle, while affirming the irrelevancy of the institution of slavery for status and relationship within the church, nevertheless did not feel it necessary to raise the issue of its retention in the society of the time (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:21-24; Colossians 3:22-25). It is difficult to see the “revolutionary dimension” of Paul’s statement here.

The third antithesis, “there is not male and female” (Greek text; see nasb margin) contains a slight change of construction, probably due to influence from Genesis 1:27.36. The distinction in sex also has no relevance to the status of believers in Christ Jesus. The reason Paul gives,

introduced by the “for” of the last clause, is that Jew and Greek, slave and freedman, male and female are “one person in Christ Jesus” (neb; cf. verse 29).

Bruce argues that, if leadership may be given to Gentiles and to slaves in the church fellowship, then why not to women? Can superiority and inferiority of status have place in the society of which our Lord said, “whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (cf. Mark 10:44)? Certainly Paul welcomed the service of women in the Gentile mission (cf. Philippians 4:3, etc.) and permitted, many believe, their exercise of prayer and prophecy in church gatherings. Does this mean that the apostle affirmed women in the church offices and permitted their teaching in the church meetings? Professor Bruce does appear to admit that other Pauline passages may provide restrictions on female activities, but he contends that such passages “are to be understood in relation to Gal. 3:28, and not vice-versa.” We are reserving a fuller discussion of the questions surrounding the third antithesis for the third division of this paper, but perhaps three points ought to be noted here. First, the antitheses are not parallel, for the distinction between male and female is a distinction arising out of creation, a distinction still maintained in family and church life in the New Testament. Second, it must also be remembered that in this context Paul is not speaking of relationships in the family and church, but of standing before God in righteousness by faith. And, third, the apostle in his later letters, such as 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, does set forth just such restrictions as Bruce mentions.

Verse 29, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise,” forms a triumphant conclusion to the apostle’s argument. Christ’s people are God’s sons, baptized by the Spirit into spiritual union with Him, the Son, Abraham’s Seed. And if believers belong to Abraham’s Seed, then they are heirs to the unconditional covenantal promises in their Representative. Thus, heirship is grounded in faith apart from the works of the Law. Those who would seek to be justified by the works of the Law are rejected. What a telling refutation of the Judaizers and their doctrine of justification and heirship by legal works! The full and complete equality that all possess in Christ is a magnificent thing to behold, and the reference to the discussion over male/female relationships must not be missed. The richness of the oneness, without any denial at all of role distinctions, is the preeminent thrust of the section we have been considering. Justified by faith in Christ, both male and female are “sons of God” (verse 26), both are “in Christ Jesus” (verse 26), united to Him in eternal union through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (verse 27), both have clothed themselves with Christ and are one in Him (verse 28). We belong to Christ and, as if that were not enough, the apostle adds that we all, both male and female, are the patriarch’s believing offspring and heirs of the stunning promises made to him (verse 29). The context contains no denial at all of role distinctions and, in fact, to inject the feminist agenda at this point dims the splendor of these grand truths.

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“It seems precarious,” Fung wisely declares, “to appeal to this verse in support of any view of the role of women in the Church, for two reasons: (a) Paul’s statement is not concerned with the

role relationships of men and women within the Body of Christ but rather with their common initiation into it through (faith and) baptism; (b) the male/female distinction, unlike the other two, has its roots in creation, so that the parallelism between the male/female pair and the other pairs may not be unduly pressed." I find that eminently Biblical and reasonable.

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Historic orthodoxy, as noted in the brief survey of the Fathers' views, has contended that Galatians 3:28 affirms the full equality of males and females "in Christ," as Paul says. All are equal in Christ, the church, and family, but the phrase, "in Christ," refers to the mystical and universal, the representative and covenantal union of all believers in the Lord. In the context of Galatians, the apostle simply affirms that every believer in Christ inherits fully the Abrahamic promises by grace apart from legal works.

The phrase, "in the church," when the subject of office and function is in view, refers to the visible body of believers. In the visible body, equality coexists with divinely mandated leadership and submission, just as it does in the family (cf. Ephesians 5:22-6:9). This is not to lead to abuse, offense, or exploitation, for all of us are essential and equally important in our positions and functions within the body, as Paul points out (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-30). The existence of elders in the church, appointed by the Holy Spirit to rule in the body, does not destroy our equality in Christ (cf. Acts 20:28; 1Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24).

The ultimate and telling proof that equality and submission may coexist in glorious harmony is found in the mediatorial mission of the Son of God, "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God" (Nicaea), who completed it in the true liberation of submission to His Father (cf. John 8:21-47; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; cf. 11:3).

There is little need to multiply footnotes to document that this has been the view of historic orthodoxy to the present and, in fact, is still the majority view, although presently under vigorous attack. The very fact that its opponents call the view of historic orthodoxy "the traditional view" acknowledges its historical primacy.

There arises at this point, however, a matter worthy of serious consideration: If the Christian church has held this view for centuries with Bible in hand, then we may presume that there exists some good reason for that fact. The Lord Jesus Christ promised the church the gift of the permanently indwelling Spirit to provide understanding of the Scriptures (cf. John 16:12-15; Psalm 36:9). We have reason to believe that His promise has been kept, and that the church has received that light in understanding the Word of God. Widespread agreement in such understanding by orthodox believers should not be abandoned without the most careful consideration of objections, both exegetical and theological.

To treat the church's historical understanding of Scripture lightly is to forget that it is the believing body that, through the centuries, carries on the theological enterprise with the Word

in hand and accompanied by the enlightening Spirit. Thus, the largest part of any theologian's work comes from reverent consideration and response to the Christian theological tradition. The creeds of the church, the results of serious spiritual and theological strife, are more important than the views of individuals. We should begin our discussions with the assumption that the church is probably right, unless exegetical and theological study compel us otherwise. "The proclamation of new discoveries," Abraham Kuyper, the fame founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, wrote, "is not always a proof of devotion to the truth, it is sometimes a tribute to self-esteem."

Galatians 4

Galatians 4:-1-7 restates the same thing as 3:15-29, but from a different angle.

4:1 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything,

4:2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.

In verses 1 and 2 Paul provides an illustration from everyday life regarding the reception of an inheritance. In both Jewish and Greek societies, a child, though he was destined to be an heir, was not in the position to receive the inheritance until he matured. Instead, he, like a slave, was under the supervision of guardians and managers (also see 3:23-24). But this was not intended to be a permanent arrangement; it was to last only until the son reached maturity. Once that time (that was determined by the father) arrived, the guardian would be set aside and the son would enjoy the benefits of his sonship.

In verses 3-5, Paul applies this illustration to the discussion at hand.

4:3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.

4:4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,

4:5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

It should be remembered that Paul is not comparing believers to unbelievers, but believers under the OT economy to believers under the new economy in Christ. It is a contrast between children under Law and sons and daughters who have received the full blessings and privileges of maturity in Christ. Just as a human father has a designated time set aside to train his children under a guardian, so has God. Believers under the Mosaic Law lived in a time of God's redemptive history that was comparable to that of children under a guardian. However, with the coming of Christ they entered into the age of maturity.

It is difficult to know precisely what the “elemental things” that held people in bondage are. In classical Greek this expression referred to “the basics” and was used of things such as the alphabet (the basic component of written language – see my notes on Hebrews 5:12). Thus, this could be referring to elemental truths found in the Mosaic Law that enslaved people (such as abstinence from certain foods, circumcision, and the celebration of Jewish feasts). Galatians 3 says, “before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law” (Gal. 3:22-23). In Acts 15:10 Peter refers to the Law as a yoke: “Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”

A second common view is that the “elemental things” is referring to demonic influence around us. This is supported by 4:8-9.

It is a difficult to decide which view is correct, but since the contrast in verse 3 stresses that people were redeemed from the Law, it seems preferable to see the elemental things that enslaved people as the Law. In other words, when the fullness of time came, Christ redeemed God’s children from enslavement to the elemental things of the Law.

Verses 4 and 5 have three important facts that need to be fleshed out.

First, Jesus came in the fullness of time; that is, the coming of the Son was designated for a particular time in God’s redemptive plan. Christ came at the right time according to God’s sovereign purposes. This describes how God brought about this great transformation that brought Jews from being children into a position where they could enjoy the full rights of sonship; it was by sending His Son (v. 4) and by sending His Spirit (v. 6) .

Secondly, being born of a woman emphasizes Jesus’ full humanity. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, “since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”

Finally, Jesus was born, not just as a man, but as a Jewish man. He lived “under the Law” and it was through His perfect obedience to the Law that He fulfilled all the demands and the requirements of the Law that the people themselves could not keep. He did this in order that He could be the curse of the Law on our behalf (Gal. 3:13) to free us from the bondage of sin.

Hodge sums these verses up well: “The law . . . perfect obedience. It says, Do this and live; and, “Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10). No man since the fall is able to fulfil these demands, yet He must fulfil them or perish. The only possible method, according to the Scriptures, by which men can be saved, is that they should be delivered from this obligation of perfect obedience. This, the Apostle teaches, has been effected by Christ. He was “made under the law to redeem them that were under the law.” (Gal. 4: 4, 5) Therefore, in Romans 6: 14, he says to believers, “You are not under the law, but under grace.” And this

redemption from the law in Romans 7:4, is said to be “by the body of Christ.” Hence we are justified not by our own obedience, but “by the obedience” of Christ. (Rom. 5: 18, 19.) Redemption in this case is not mere deliverance, but a true redemption, i. e., a deliverance effected by satisfying all the just claims which are against us. The Apostle says, in Galatians 4:5, that we are thus redeemed from the law, in order “that we might receive the adoption of sons”; that is, be introduced into the state and relation of sons to God. Subjection to the law, in our case, was a state of bondage. Those under the law are, therefore, called slaves, δουλοί. From this state of bondage they are redeemed, and introduced into the liberty of the sons of God. This redemption includes freedom from a slavish spirit, which is supplanted by a spirit of adoption, filling the heart with reverence, love, and confidence in God as our reconciled Father.” (Hodge, Systematic Theology, II, 518)

Paul’s use of “we” in verse 5 provides strong evidence that this does not refer to Jews. Paul’s whole argument is that the Gentile Galatians are the ones who have received adoption. It also shows that Paul saw all men as people under the Law, not only the Jews.

4:6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

4:7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

The implications from verses 1-5 are drawn in 4:6-7: evidence of sonship is the reception of the Spirit and so believers have the right to call God their Father. Furthermore, since they are sons they are no longer slaves, but heirs of the promise.

Why is the Holy Spirit called “the Spirit of His Son”?

Similar language is used elsewhere. Romans 8:9 calls the Holy Spirit “the Spirit of Christ” and Philippians 1:19 calls Him “Spirit of Jesus Christ.” The usual explanation is that Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit is experienced through faith in Christ, not the Law. The imagery is that of the New Covenant prophesied about in Ezekiel 36:25-26: “I will cleanse you from all your filthiness . . . I will give you a new heart . . . I will put My Spirit within you. . .” In other words, the Spirit was uniquely related to the coming and work of Christ. Though the Holy Spirit is eternal, with the advent of Jesus, the Spirit comes to believers in a new way; it is the ministry of the Spirit that reveals Christ to us. In John 16:14 Jesus said, “He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.”

Paul’s wording in verse 6 is strange; it sounds as if after we become sons, God sends His Spirit to provide the evidence we need of it. But Paul is not speaking chronologically, rather he is stating facts: sonship includes possession of the Spirit.

Sonship is expressed by the acclamation that God is “Abba” Father. This is the great privilege of sonship. In the OT there were only a few references to God as “Father.” However, when you come to the NT you will find that it is the normal way that Jesus addresses God. In John 17 alone Jesus calls God “Father” six times. The great hallmark and breathtaking privilege we have under the New Covenant is that we are

brought into the same relationship with God that Jesus Himself shares with His Father! We now have the same right of access to God that Jesus did; we possess the same sense of intimacy and the same assurance that He loves us. We can address Him as Jesus did, as Abba (Daddy). We can come to God as Christ did because we come in Christ. And this is the common possession of all the people of God. This should cause us to stop in amazement; “the damnable dust of the earth can call the ever-blessed, infinite Creator “Daddy” all because of the merits of Jesus Christ” (Hamilton).

The word “therefore” in verse 7 signals the conclusion. Since believers have been freed from the Law they are no longer slaves but sons, and as sons they are heirs. Romans 8:17: “and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.” Possessions can be stolen or lost; an inheritance is a promise that cannot be taken away by anyone.

4:8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.

4:9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

4:10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.

4:11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

Verses 8-11 form the conclusion of a long argument that had begun in 3:15.

Paul begins by reminding the Galatians of their life prior to knowing Christ. At that time they were enslaved to false gods. In 1 Corinthians 10:20 Paul says, “the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.”

“One of the key themes that ties together Paul’s argument from redemptive history in this section of the letter is ‘slavery.’ Life ‘under Law’ is characterized as one in which human beings lived under the dominion of and tyranny of sin. Believers were ‘imprisoned . . . under sin’ (3:22), ‘held captive under the law’ (3:23), ‘enslaved under the elements of the world’ (4:3), but now they are free from the bondage that previously ensnared them (4:5) and are no longer slaves (which implies they previously were slaves, 4:7)” (Schreiner, 277).

Verses 9 and 10 compare being enslaved to false gods with being enslaved to the law, and then contrast both forms of slavery to the Galatians’ new position in Christ.

Although believers know God, the reason they know Him is because they are known by Him. In this context, to “know” the believer expresses the idea of foreknowledge, that is, that God has set His affection on them and chose them to be saved. Genesis 18:19, Jeremiah 1:5, and Amos 3:2 are good examples of this (see my notes on Romans 8:29 on our website). If they have been known by God, how could they then revert back to “the weak and worthless elemental things, to which they desire to be enslaved all over again?” Devotion to the Law is just another form of paganism (Schreiner, 278); it is returning to false gods (4:8).

Although verse 10 could be a reference to things in the pagan calendar of celebrations and observances, in the context of the book it seems more likely that it is the observance of the Jewish calendar for which they were being criticized. The same concern arises in Romans 14:5 and Colossians 2:16.

The Galatians' views of salvation had called into question how effective Paul's ministry was among them (4:11). If they believed they could add the law into salvation, Paul's work in preaching the gospel among them had come up empty.