

Session 4 - Neither Male nor Female (Galatians 3:28)

“...for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28

I. Neither male nor female. (Galatians 3:28)

- A. Some have said Galatians 3:28 is the most “socially explosive” statement in the New Testament. But is it meant to be socially disruptive? Paul was actually trying to bring unity out of diversity. He believed that human distinctions and the problems which arise from those distinctions would dissolve in Christ. Those who would bind the Jewish law on the church during the middle of the century were dividing the church.
- B. Few misunderstand the basic meaning, namely that access to God is open to all through faith in Christ. But does the statement go beyond equal access to salvation to include roles in the church and in society?
 - 1. There are those who argue that “all is changed in Christ”.
 - 2. There are others who argue that value (e.g. Jew versus Greek) is equal in Christ for all yet roles ordained at creation must be maintained.

II. Arguments for the “all is changed in Christ” or egalitarian approach.

- A. This passage is a succinct summary of Paul’s entire theology. Galatians 3:28 is Paul’s “Magna Carta” or “Declaration of Independence in Christ”. Therefore this passage cannot be subordinated to other passages. Rather other passages must be interpreted in light of this passage.
 - 1. We presently live during a special time, preparing for the Second Coming and following the resurrection. God is creating a community during this time that prefigures and embodies the reconciliation and healing of the world, returning it to the created harmony before the Fall. (Romans 15:7 – 13)
 - 2. “Man” once again will be male and female as God created him, that is, a relationship of divine unity. (Genesis 1:27)
 - 3. The community must be unified. (I Corinthians 1:10)
 - 4. This unification comes in large part by righting age old injustices. (Galatians 1:4, 5:1) Men and women are therefore freed from the slavery of false stereotypes.
 - 5. We must live in community as if the time is near for the coming of Jesus. (I Corinthians 7:29 – 31) The new world has already broken in.

6. Men and women (just as slave and free, circumcised and uncircumcised) are therefore one in Christ and live in relations of loving mutuality. (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:9 – 11)
 7. Any compromise of this loving mutuality is made in a spirit of love so that persons less mature in their faith may grow in their faith. (I Corinthians 9:19 – 23)
- B. From this basic theology, Paul derives his view of the role of women in the church .
1. Subordination of women in the world is parallel to the institution of slavery. God has opened doors in the church which no person can shut.
 2. What happens through baptism supercedes every other reality. Though “man” will always be male and female, what happens in Christ transcends even the Law and the order of creation. We are a new creation – one in Christ.
 3. Men and women, through Christ, are redeemed even in this world from false stereotypes and discrimination which inhibit a true relationship with God. The gospel, by its very nature, fuels social change toward justice and equality.
 4. The new world has broken into the existing world, a world which returns humankind to the state before the Fall (the peaceable kingdom, the kingdom where gender differences are minimal). (Acts 2: 1 – 4, 17)
 5. In the new community (the church) old distinctions are transcended. The church becomes the kingdom of heaven on earth (and perhaps there will be no gender distinctions in heaven). (Mark 12: 18 – 27)
 6. Passages which contradict 3:28 (such as I Corinthians 14:34-35) should be viewed as temporary expedients (an accommodation to culture) which look forward to a greater good (just as Onesimus was asked to return to Philemon [Philemon 12] though in reality slavery eventually should be abolished).

III. Arguments for the male spiritual leadership or “keep role and worth separate” approach.

- A. Galatians 3:28 should not be taken out of context. The conflict addressed by Paul in this passage related to the tension between justification of the believer in Christ apart from legal works, not the societal problem of the relation of men to women.
 1. The letter is written in response to a heresy in the church related to binding specific Jewish laws upon the Galatian Christians. (3:1 – 5)
 2. The law was a slave guardian and the coming of the Son has freed us from that slavery. (3:21 – 25)

3. Galatians was therefore written to strongly emphasize our sonship (we are sons and daughters of God – Galatians 3:26) as opposed to our slavery to the law.
 4. Galatians emphasizes the replacement of the old law with sonship in Christ yet it does not replace the created order with a new order. If we wish to look back, look back to Abraham, not to creation. (3:16 – 18)
 5. Galatians 3:28 should not be applied beyond the realm of salvation in Christ.
- B. From this basic theology, Paul derives his arguments for the role of women in the church.
1. Equality in Christ does not abolish gender (and gender will not be abolished in heaven).
 2. The letter to the Galatians has nothing to say about roles in the church. The letter is about our faith relationship with God through Christ and whether we impose the Jewish law upon that relationship.
 3. None of the New Testament writings abolish the traditional role of men and women in Greco-Roman (or Jewish) society.
 4. Paul (and Christ for that matter) was not interested in social reform, but rather spiritual salvation. The letter (and the gospels) was not written to inspire social change. The Kingdom is not of this world.
 5. Distinction in role does not equate with lesser or greater value. Submission does not equate with inferiority. Both male and female are natural heirs in Christ (3:26)
 6. Scripture cannot contradict scripture and therefore there is no conflict between Galatians 3:28 and I Corinthians 12 - 14. We are, both male and female, the royal priesthood yet there are different roles and service within the priesthood. (I Corinthians 12:5)

IV. The context of Galatians 3:28 as it relates to the role of women in the church.

- A. Paul is perhaps speaking in Galatians to two audiences, both of whom have not put Christ first: those who profess to be “in Christ” but still deficient because of their adherence to the law (1:7, 5:4); and those who believe themselves superior in understanding (5:16 – 26).
1. The audience which binds the law he addresses directly but the other perhaps indirectly.
 2. In other words, the structure of Galatians is similar to Romans. The bulk of both letters is directed toward freedom in Christ. Yet the latter portion of the letters is directed toward the loving application of that freedom in Christ.
- B. Paul insists on the superiority of Christ in all things (justification by faith rather than works of the law).

- C. With Christ there is a new creation (the law has passed away). It is not just faith vs. law, it is Christ vs. anything else.
- D. Paul and the Galatians are interested in binding together the community of believers. For Paul, unity comes through being in Christ and from the love of Christ which sums up the law of Christ. (5:14, 15) For some Galatians, however, unity has become equated with circumcision. (5:2 –4) For others, freedom had become equated with giving oneself over to one's sinful nature (5:19 – 21).
- E. Being in Christ and living in loving unity means attention is addressed to the works of the flesh versus the fruits of the spirit. (5:16 – 26)
- F. These fruits manifest themselves in relationship (such as the relationship between men and women).

V. The message of 3:28 as it relates to the role of women in the church.

- A. The core message of 3:28 is the superiority of Christ. All interpretations must be considered in light of this message.
- B. Paul's message does not specifically address roles. Rather he focuses upon worth of and respect for one another, upon the community in Christ, upon the fruits of the spirit which manifest themselves in all relationships..
- C. The three examples of polar groups he addresses (Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, males and females) are three groups where society has set distinctions and conflict abounds. The three groups each have within them the potential for oppression and a power struggle. In Christ that power struggle is eliminated.
- D. There does not appear to be any Biblical evidence that gender differences will be abolished in the Kingdom of God, neither here nor in the hereafter. Can any one of us imagine maintaining our identity without a gender identity? Our bodies will be resurrected. (I Corinthians 15:35 – 49)
- E. At the same time, Paul emphasizes that conflicts about male vs. female should never divide the church. We are free and our current conflicts originate do not derive from freedom in Christ which manifests itself in love for one another..
- F. Paul may be saying that groups which are in conflict within the Christian community must treat one another as equally valuable. In other words, social expediency must give way to unity and equality in Christ. (Galatians 2: 11 – 14) If we err, we should err toward love, peace, patience, etc.
- G. Equal value, on the other hand, does not necessarily correspond to role relationships. In fact, Paul provides little guidance in Galatians regarding the role of women compared to men in the church.
- H. The elimination of unnecessary barriers and unnecessary distinctions and reconciliation of conflict can promote unity in Christ (Paul's major concern for the Galatians).
- I. Therefore, if the church takes this passage seriously we should find a way to abolish conflicts about gender.

References

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