

# Women's Ministry

The Formation of Christian (Gender) Identity in Galatians 3:28  
A Historical-critical and Intertextual Study

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## Summary

Galatians 3:28 is not merely a baptismal formula that incorporates believers into one church-body regardless of ethnic, social or gender barriers ('getting in') and thus securing them 'equality in salvific standing before God' in distinction to 'functional equality' ('staying in') only. Reading baptism and 'being clothed with Christ' in light of Galatians 2:14-21 (διὰ/ ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν),<sup>1</sup> which stands in continuation with the OT faith/righteousness-tradition and pictures the OT relationship between Isaiah's Messianic King and His kingdom's inhabitants as ideal, this thesis finds that salvation in Galatians is the product of an imitative identification with God, or of a 'walk of becoming' (as different emphasis on the same reality that is usually described with terms of 'getting in'/'staying in'), which is shaped around Christ's example as paradigm, having God's monotheistic character and Edenic revelation as anchor and the Spirit's work as identity-shaping force. As much as salvation is the effect of the Spirit's identity-shaping force, authority-bestowing for ministry regardless the individual's condition in the flesh (ethnicity, social class or gender) is its expression.

A unifying relational substructure of both distinct Testaments is the best explanation for the flexibility of Pauline vocabulary (e.g., the law contextualised as both bad and good): peaceable oneness with God is the all-embracing purpose of humanity. Galatians 3:28 stands at the crux of Paul's most flexible vocabulary (νόμος,<sup>2</sup> σὰρξ,<sup>3</sup> πνεῦμα,<sup>4</sup> ἔργον<sup>5</sup> and καύχημα<sup>6</sup> plus derivatives), expressing Paul's blunt summary of what he perceives as 'flesh' with its structures. This flesh stands in aggressive rivalry to the Spirit as identity-shaping force if used with the same function. The Spirit forms Christian gender-identity using flesh and its structures, but the truly righteous are not subject to them, unless the structures are linked to relational agreements leading to devoted commitment in service of people and people-groups.

Thus, female gender roles in marriage and ministry are fashioned by the Spirit (as anchored in Christ's example, God's monotheistic character and the Edenic revelation) and are not pre-written or limited by a code in the flesh. Both complementarian and egalitarian models in marriage and church ministry can function, but are optional, depending on the individual's character and gifts, as well as on the social contexts given.

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## • Preface: Introductory Study •

The main body of this study focusses on Galatians 3:28. However, it is useful to include in the preface an essay about the current status of gender studies in evangelical literature to set the stage. Originally, this was an essay with the topic “Exploring a Theology of Gender through the Lens of Culture: are Male and Female Roles and Characteristics Culturally Defined or are these Biblically Defined and Universally Applicable?”.

### Introduction

#### PART I: Theology of Gender and Culture in the Best Case

Genesis 1–2

Galatians 3:28

Phoebe (Rom 16:1–2,  $\phi\omicron\iota\beta\eta$ )

Junia (Rom 16:7, 15 and Acts 27:1, 3  $\text{Ἰουνιᾶς}$ )

#### PART II: Theology of Gender and Culture in the Normal Case

1 Timothy 2:1–4, Romans 13:1–7 and Ephesians 5

1 Corinthians 11

#### PART III: theology of gender and culture in the worst case

1 Timothy 2:12–15

1 Corinthians 14:1–40

### Conclusion

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### Introduction

This paper searches to demonstrate that the sub-cultural biblical principle of gender is a community’s pursue of peace by the Holy Spirit,<sup>7</sup> which does not, first and foremost, define male and female roles and characteristics, but rather it defines the principle of equality incarnated within a culture with its definition of male and female gender roles. This quest for peace by the Spirit leads eventually, in the best case, to a reformation of society-structures (Gen 1–2; Gal 3:28; Rom 16:1–2 [ $\phi\omicron\iota\beta\eta$ ]; 7 [ $\text{Ἰουνιᾶς}$ ]), in the normal case to equal conduct such as prophesying and teaching in the service, while demonstrating a cultural, gender-bound sign of respect (e.g. head-covering, 1 Cor 11; respect for the household-codes, Eph 5), and in the worst case to a strict call for order; men and women with destructive attitudes must conform to the gender-roles defined by the surrounding society until they matured enough to benefit the church-community through their leadership (e.g. 1 Tim 2:12–15; 1 Cor 14:32–35).

This paper builds on the conviction that male and female roles and characteristics are always culturally defined, as the biblical texts are God’s word revealed within a culture, and that the true challenge lies in determining sub-cultural biblical principles on the basis of key gender-passages such as Genesis 1–2, Gal 3:28, Rom 16:1–2 [Φοίβη] and 7 [Ἰουνιάς], which are universally applicable through every culture. To determine these sub-cultural principles of a theology of gender, this paper applies rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis and social-scientific criticism.

The current gender-debate within evangelicalism, that had its peak between the 70s and 90s of the last century, roughly divides between egalitarians<sup>8</sup> (CBE; Pierce, Groothuis and Fee, *Discovering Biblical Equality*)<sup>9</sup> and complementarians<sup>10</sup> (CBMW; *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*).<sup>11</sup> Egalitarians argue that man and woman are equal in worth and should have equal chances to fulfil leadership roles at home and the church (“Statement on Men, Women, and Biblical Equality”). Complementarians argue that man and woman are equal in worth, but must take different roles in the home and the church, which essentially excludes women from the highest leadership positions in church and takes them the right to make important final decisions at home (“Danvers Statement,” 1987; “Nashville Statement,” 2017).

Though there was a considerable drop off interest at the turn of the millennium, as studies shifted more to issues surrounding the LGBT-, and LGBTIQ-communities,<sup>12</sup> several notable works have been published.<sup>13</sup> Searching to mediate between the egalitarian and complementarian perspectives, it is Ralf Lubs’ shalom perspective on women’s ministry, which truly demonstrates this type of creative genius, a new socio-culturally perspective on women’s ministry.<sup>14</sup> The following study benefits thus from these materials and from independent primary-source studies by the writer to explore a theology of gender through the lens of culture.

## Part I: Theology of Gender and Culture in the Best Case

A churches’ quest for peace by the Spirit lead eventually, in the best case, to a reformation of gender-roles, which were well-established within society, the church and the home. The writer of Gen 1–2 does not establish a culture of gender-roles, but he tells a story of man and woman as ideal co-workers, advancing peace with God and men beyond the borders of Eden. Culturally determined gender-roles were simply not needed. This vision is captured by Paul in Gal 3:28 and demonstrated by the living examples of 1<sup>st</sup> century female church-leaders Phoebe (Rom 16:1–2, Φοίβη) and Junias (Rom 16:7, Ἰουνιάς).

## • Introduction •

Galatians 3:28 has been the subject of conservative Christian debates concerning female gender roles in the home and the church: “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.” Known as the egalitarian-complementarian controversy, the discussion was refreshed in the 1980s and has not stopped since.<sup>69</sup> While egalitarians,<sup>70</sup> who are also called evangelical feminists,<sup>71</sup> celebrate Galatians 3:28 as the Pauline “Magna Carta of Humanity,”<sup>72</sup> which proclaims ontological and functional gender-equality, the complementarians, who are also called evangelical traditionalists or hierarchicalists,<sup>73</sup> affirm “an equal share in the blessings of salvation,” (equality in position) but exclude gender-equality in function within marriage and the Church (complementarity in function). This thesis re-thinks the Galatian concept of faith/faithfulness and justification, which differs greatly from the narrow complementarian reading and understanding of salvation. Furthermore, an analysis of Paul’s flexible vocabulary leads to a revised egalitarian reading of Galatians 3:28 within a more fitting salvific-historical framework, because it seems to explain Paul’s Spirit-flesh-law matrix better than most complementarian propositions.

### Securing Galatians 3:28: Textual Criticism

The rendering “πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ” for Galatians 3:28 is, according to the editing board of NA28, the original reading because Codex Vaticanus B (4<sup>th</sup> century), C and D (5<sup>th</sup> century) as well as <sup>2</sup>κ (correction of the 4<sup>th</sup> century Sinaiticus from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onward) offer a strong and early support. The fact that εἷς does not appear in  $\mathfrak{B}^{46}$  (ca. 200CE papyrus), A (5<sup>th</sup> century majuscule) and an undated correction in  $\kappa^c$ , using εστε Χριστου, should not be overly emphasized because (a) the external evidence between both readings is almost equally balanced, and (b) the internal evidence suggests a clear contextual tie to the idea of being εἷς in Christ.<sup>74</sup> The Galatian context expresses the believer’s participation in the promise by imitative identification with the one seed, who issues from the one God (Gal 3:16, 20) and is used in the wider context of its intertext (Gen 1:27; 2:24): “καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν” (translation for Hebrew  $\text{תְּהִי־אֶחָד}$ ; also, God’s character in Deut 6:4).<sup>75</sup>

## Sources

This thesis builds on all arguments concerning Galatians 3:28 within the complementarian Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (JBMW) from its start in 1995 until now.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, it extracts the central arguments concerning Galatians 3:18 from Piper and Grudem's two famous books<sup>77</sup> and Richard Hove's book on the same topic.<sup>78</sup> In due course, the Old Testament (OT) intertext and monotheistic presuppositions provide a solid background and anchor for Galatians 3:28 in the expression "for you are all one (εἷς) in Christ Jesus." The word studies of this thesis are built on the foundation of Nestle-Aland 28 in comparison with the matrix created on the basis of A. Rahlfs' Septuagint Version (LXX) of the OT and the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) Hebrew text (MT).<sup>79</sup>

### Research Questions, Methodology and Three Hypotheses

#### *Research Questions and Methodology*

PART I deals with the following questions: 'Positional salvific standing'<sup>80</sup> surely exists implicitly, but was this theological construct an integral part of the Pauline exposition in Galatians? What is the nature and establishment of salvation in Galatians on the basis of πίστις and righteousness δικαιοσύνη (for neither σωζω, nor its derivatives appear in Galatians)? This thesis will analyse how Paul's theology fits into the OT tradition of πίστις/δικαιοσύνη passages and how the Isaianic visions of the divine Messiah-King in relation to His kingdom's inhabitants points to the imitative identification of Christ by the believer through the Spirit.

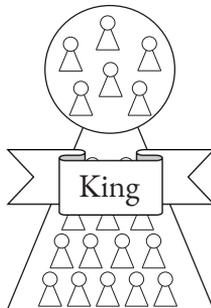
PART II examines the flexibility of Pauline vocabulary that necessitates a relational substructure to resolve the tension, which is merely a linguistic one. How is the law and the flesh used in Galatians? What is the semantic overlap between the law and the flesh? What is the semantic overlap between the law and God as one? How does the Spirit function in relation to the law/flesh? How does Paul resolve the tension of the law's treatment in the OT and the New Testament (NT) without losing his orthodoxy (is his theology in continuity with God's eternal revelation)? It will be argued that those boasting in God and standing in the process of imitative identification with Christ through the Spirit's identity-shaping work, stand in a different relationship to the flesh, law and the Spirit than those boasting in the flesh/law in order to reap to themselves honour on earth (which in fact perishes) at the expense

of others. Eventually, Pauline theology in Galatians 3:28 can only be satisfactorily explained if there is a horizontal undivided line of people throughout all the ages who walked in a relationship with God. Abraham's true seed are only those identifying with him not only in the flesh but also in their faithful/righteous walk. Those who are merely according to the flesh have never been recipients of the promise.

PART III pulls the threads of the argument together, establishing a complete theory of a relational substructure throughout the ages, dealing also with evaluations of Pauline eschatology by several complementarians, egalitarians and other scholars. Furthermore, the two anchor-questions and corresponding arguments of complementarianism are dealt with: Does Eden establish the ideal of male headship? Is the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father compatible with Paul's monotheistic presuppositions?

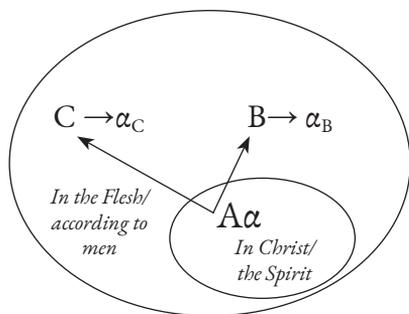
### *Three Hypotheses*

Three hypotheses with corresponding charts guide the argument of this thesis. Hypothesis I is established in PART I. It roots Paul's argument in its OT intertext, which serves as an example for the development of Christian identity *κατὰ πνεῦμα*: the Isaianic Kingdom of God. The hypothesis is that (a) Christ's 'faithfulness' and human 'faith' in response (symbolized by being baptized and clothed in Christ and Galatians 2:15-21; 3:26-27) correspond to Christ and the Messianic King in Isaiah, whose character and reign are to be imitated by His people who identify with Him. He is the perfect revelation of God's character and His action to bring about relational connection with humanity. Furthermore, (b) the Spirit produces and works out fruitfulness in His people (e.g., righteous attitude/character) from within, rather than imposed purity-law structures from without. But the righteous law also condemns the unrighteous to protect those who are righteous in their relationships. The one true seed of Abraham is produced by the Spirit with the people's cooperation.



The True Seed: 'Imitative Identification' with the Servant-King's character and reign

Furthermore, hypothesis II is put forward in PART II and establishes a case for a biblical substructure of relationship in Galatians 3:25-29. ‘Oneness’ in Galatians 3:29 is not merely ‘unity in diversity’ (complementarians), or ‘unqualified unity’ (egalitarians), but it is ‘unity qualified by imitative identification with the one God as revealed in Eden/ through His promises/ in Scripture’. Thus, Paul opposes a walk *κατὰ πνεῦμα* to a walk *κατὰ σάρκα*, because God and His initial revelation do not contradict by virtue of His monotheistic nature. The hypothesis is that the “no male and female” couplet (*ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ*) serves a double function: first, it (A) stands in parallel to the other two couplets (B, C), signifying earthly principles *κατὰ σάρκα* (A, B, C), which are manifested in Jewish separation laws, Greek society structures, functions, roles and the like. They are to be overcome by a walk *κατὰ πνεῦμα*. Second, it (Aa) serves as paradigm for the other couplets, introducing the Edenic ideal for a walk *κατὰ πνεῦμα* in the *σάρξ*/ in the earthly context ( $B \rightarrow \alpha_B$ ;  $C \rightarrow \alpha_C$ ). Galatians 3:25-29 is thus a Pauline midrash<sup>81</sup> of Genesis 1:26 (*ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ*), the Adamic promise (Gen 12:3) and God’s revelation of His monotheistic nature (Deut 6:4). The walk *κατὰ πνεῦμα* overcomes opposing principles *κατὰ σάρκα* naturally from below. If someone opposes this peaceable overcoming by re-imposing principles *κατὰ σάρκα* upon a veritably righteous person *κατὰ πνεῦμα*, he/she calls God’s judgement/curse upon himself (*κρίμα/κατάρα*) unto exile from the community *κατὰ πνεῦμα* (Gal 1:8-9; 2:4; 3:10, 13; 4:4:30; 5:3), which is slavery (4:8-9, 21-31; 5:1). Paul can state this on the basis of Christ’s work, which completely broke with the identity-shaping function of the separation laws on the one hand but which completely maintains the principles *κατὰ πνεῦμα* in the relational substructure of both Testaments on the other. This theology could be phrased as ‘Pneumatico-Eirenologic Messianism’.<sup>82</sup>



Pneumatologico-Eirenologic Messianism  
*unity in the Spirit, not in the Flesh*

Hypothesis III is expressed in PART III, which establishes a case for a biblical substructure of relationship (X) in connection to its expression through the OT and NT covenants. The hypothesis is that Paul's Galatian theology is completely consistent with the OT, though he pushes the paradox of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments to its furthest extremes. For example, separation laws can be completely abolished in the NT and at the same time be completely authoritative in the OT, without compromising God's undivided, consistent and trustworthy revelation (substructure). A mixture of intertextual and historical-critical methods brings out Paul's flexible use of vocabulary and syntax to express the dynamics of the relationship between God and mankind. A careful analysis of Paul's rhetoric shows that all he really does is to push the overall biblical presuppositions of God's monotheistic nature, the Edenic relational-ideal and the coming of the Messianic Christ to their logical ends. His short-term goal is to exile those according to the flesh (*κατὰ σάρκα*) from the community according to the Spirit (*κατὰ πνεῦμα*), because the former persecutes the latter by misusing the law for their own purposes/glory. But his long-term goal is to obtain peace, holistic oneness, between God and His people. It follows that the Galatian agitators' and their followers' eschatology was neither over-realized nor under-realized, but rather a superficial and non-relationship-based eschatology. Thus, the agitators and their followers hoped neither for the wrong things per se (e.g. for being pure), nor did they merely hope for the right things at the wrong time only (e.g. for OT purity laws that are obsolete in the NT), but their hopes were futile, because they were motivated by an underlying devotion to anything/anyone else than the eternal, monotheistic and loving creator-God, namely to selfish temporal objectives *κατὰ σάρκα*.

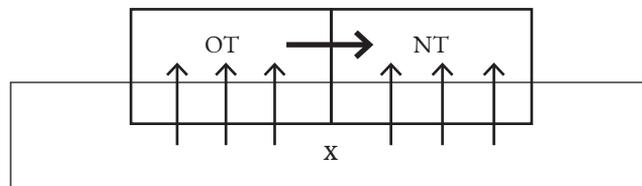


Chart 1: X = *kata pneuma*  
OT + NT