

*The Whole Counsel of God*  
**Study 15**

**GENDER IN CHRIST**

***“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,  
there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ.”***

***Galatians 3.28***

We are exploring the significance of the fact that God made mankind male and female (Gen 1.27). So far we have focused on the created differences between man and woman. First we looked at the difference by created design, i.e., gender, and this difference is passed on to all through birth. Then we looked at the union of one man and woman in marriage. This union is based on the gender difference and brings out the full significance of this difference. The differences we have been looking at are set in creation. Now we will look at what to make of this created difference in the new creation in Christ.

It would be not true to the apostle Paul to say that Gal 3.28, quoted above, raises a challenge against the created difference between male and female. In writing the letter to the Galatians, Paul was not dealing with the question of gender, and he did not have in mind what he taught in other epistles on the difference between men and women. In writing Gal 3.28 Paul was not raising a challenge against his own teachings. But, Paul’s statement that there is no male and female has been used to raise this challenge. Our intention in this study is not so much to meet this challenge as to come to a full understanding of what the Bible teaches on the subject of gender. What Paul says in Gal 3.28 adds to (rather than takes away from) what the Bible teaches on the subject.

**A.THE ORDER OF CREATION AND OUR EXISTENCE IN CHRIST  
INTEGRATED**

The weight of Paul’s teaching is on the side of the gender difference established in creation. In fact, in everything that Paul wrote on the subject of gender, he establishes the created difference between men and women except for the one phrase on male and female found in Gal 3.28. Paul always gave stiff resistance against any move to discount or to go against the created order. His answer is always given by showing how the created order is integrated into our existence in Christ.

**1. Gender and marriage in Christ**

We have seen this integration in 1Cor 11.2-16. This passage is concerned with the way the created difference of gender is to be displayed. Paul puts up front the hierarchy of relationships that roots the order of relationships in Christ and God (v 3) so that the created relationship between man and woman is seen within the order of relationships revealed in Christ. In 1Cor 11.11-12 Paul deals with the ongoing balance of the relationship between men and women through birth. The fact that he says that the man is through the woman, which is not seen in the creation account, shows that he is dealing with the current dynamics of the existence between men and women. Paul maintains the difference between the genders by saying that the woman is *from* the man while the man is *through* the woman. He also puts the man in parallel with God when he says, “...and all things originate *from* God” (v 12). For our discussion, the significant point is that the ongoing interdependence between the man and the woman’s existence is *in the Lord*. The title, Lord, is used for the Son of God in his role in which all from the Father is through him (1Cor 8.6).

The discussion in 1Cor 11.2-16 suggests that the Corinthians did not see the matter of the display of gender difference as significant in their life in Christ. Paul shows them otherwise. He does not leave gender difference as a mere creational fact. It gains its fullest significance in Christ.

We saw the same integration in Paul's treatment of marriage in Eph 5.22-33. Paul bases marriage on creation as his citation of Gen 2.24 in Eph 5.31 shows, but he does not derive the obligations of marriage from creation. Rather, he derives them from the way the relationship between Christ and the church functions. The created reality of marriage is for the apostle about Christ and the church. In his instructions on marriage and in his exposition of the mystery of Christ and the church, the apostle assigns the roles to the man and the woman according to the order of the creation of man and woman. Just as the man is the head of the woman (1Cor 11.3), the husband is the head of the wife. When it comes to the genders, the man's headship is based on the order of creation. In marriage, the man's headship is linked to Christ's headship. This further shows how Paul moved between the order of creation and the reality in Christ without any sense of disjunction. He shows no awareness that in Christ the created order was abolished or discounted in any way.

## **2. The two sides of the work of Christ (Col 1.15-23)**

The way Paul integrated the creational realities of gender and marriage with the reality in Christ lines up with his view of the total work of Christ. The confession of faith in 1Cor 8.6 states that Christ is the Lord through whom all things that are from the Father exist. This confession ascribes to Christ the role of the agent of creation as well as salvation. Paul opens up this view of Christ in Col 1.15-23.

In this passage in Colossians, Christ is presented as the agent of creation (vv 16-17) and of the new creation (vv 18-22). There is no sense of a split in Christ's two works. In fact, his role as the agent of creation is presented as the basis for his work in reconciling creation to God. By him all things were created in heaven and one earth (v 16), and through him God reconciles all things to himself, whether things on earth or in heaven (v 20). Just as he holds all things in the first creation together (v 17), he reconciles all things to God (v 20). His work in reconciling all things shows that he overcomes the alienation of the created world from God through sin. This outlook that the apostle presents speaks against any idea that Christ would abolish the created order. He rather brings it out of a state of alienation from God to being reconciled to God.

The way Christ impacts life in the natural order of this world is seen in Paul's instructions for Christians about the basic relationships that order life in this world.

## **3. The structure of relationships in the Lord**

In Col 3.18-4.1 and the parallel passage in Eph 5.22-6.9, Paul gives instructions on the basic relationships in which the Christians must function as they live on earth. He covers three relationships: 1) wives and husbands, 2) children and fathers and 3) slaves and masters. These three cover the three basic relationships that structure human life: 1) sexual relationship, 2) family relationship and 3) economic relationship. We will call these the structural relationships. They have a very definite structure and fixed order in which one party is over the other. These three relationships have not come into being as a result of the work of Christ in reconciling people to God. Rather, they are basic to human life within creation. God created Adam and Eve for a sexual relationship, to procreate and to work on earth.

In his instructions, Paul is addressing believers who are on both sides of the relationships. This means that he is speaking to husbands and wives, to fathers and children and to masters and slaves who are in the Lord. This fact explains the perspective that Paul brings to the relationships. He does not give counsel to make these relationships function properly and effectively within the natural order of the world. Rather, he instructs all parties as to how to conduct themselves within these relationships in the Lord. The apostle sees these relationships taken up and structured by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Throughout his instructions Paul points to the way the relationships become marked by hostility. Husbands become embittered against their wives (Col 3.19) and wives tend not to submit and respect. Fathers exasperate their children so that the children lose heart (v 20) and children need to be told to obey. Slaves tend to give only external service, by way of eyeservice (v 22; Eph 6.6), while masters threaten their slaves (Eph 6.9). Paul's answer to the dysfunction in human relationships is to instruct each to be governed by the Lord within the relationship. Here we see the direction of Paul's thinking. What is part of the order of life within the created world and is ruined by sin is taken up in the Lord and made to function within God's will.

In our world, we are accustomed to viewing people in a way that is very different from the apostle's view. We see people as individuals who come to a relationship as individuals and build the relationship as a partnership. Each party is a head in his own right and decides what he will do in the relationship. Each contributes his side via his demands. This leaves relationships as two heads butting each other. In our modern view, we look at what Paul presents from top down and see the top position as the one that has the human dignity. In an ideal world, all would have the top position. Each would be his own head.

Paul's approach to these relationships is opposite to ours. He sees them from the bottom up. We should first of all acknowledge that there is a top down view built into Paul's instructions. The husbands, fathers and masters represent the Lord in the relationships whereas the wives, children and slaves do not. But, while Paul understands the relationships to be structured this way, this does not determine the way he looks at them. He looks at the relationships from the side of submission. The order in which he moves is: wives to husbands, children to fathers and slaves to masters. This is not due to having a primary concern with putting the people in submission into their place as if they were the ones that needed the correction. In fact, Paul points to more abuses on the side of those on top in the relationships. He corrects husbands' tendency to become embittered with their wives (Col 3.19), fathers' tendency to exasperate (Col 3.21) and provoke (Eph 6.4) their children, and masters' habit of using threats (Eph 6.9).

Paul begins his instructions for Christians in the structural relationships with the general instruction to all, "...and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph 5.21). This sets Paul's perspective on the structural relationships. The charter of life in Christ is the charter of submission. Submission is the only universal position in the body of Christ. We saw this when we studied 1Cor 11.3. In the hierarchy of relationships, only God the Father does not have a head over him. He is not in a position of submission. All others, beginning with Christ, are in a position of submission. Those who are in a position over others have their position in submission. This is clear in Eph 5.22-6.9. The husband's role as head is to act toward his wife as Christ acts toward the church. He is under Christ and must represent him. He has no headship that originates with himself. The fathers are to impart the discipline and instruction of the Lord. They are the Lord's deputies, doing the Lord's work in the relationship. Paul reminds the masters that they have a master in heaven to whom they are accountable (6.9). In fact, he instructs the masters to do the same things as the slaves are instructed to do in vv 7-8. They are like foremen over slaves who themselves are slaves to their master.

Paul approaches each relationship from the point of view of the one in submission (wives, children and slaves). These must act toward those over them as to the Lord. Then Paul addresses those above them. These must pursue the interests of Christ for those in submission. They must care for the subjects and make sure that they do not make submission a harsh or unpleasant experience. The one in the top position functions for the one in the subject position. He serves in the Lord's relation to the one who is subject. The subject in turn relates to the one over him as to the Lord. The dynamics of the relationship shows that the relationship is stretched out between the Lord and the one in submission. The human party that is placed over the other is a middleman. In Paul's view, the ethics of the relationships are defined by the position of submission and not of authority.

The fact that Paul makes submission the charter principle of Christian ethics runs deep in his teaching. This is brought out in Phil 2.5-11. God the Father is never in a position of submission and is the reference point for all exaltation. He exalted Christ above all because he humbled himself above all. This sets the pattern for us. The only way to exaltation is through submission. The way in Christ is always and only the way of submission. This gives the wives, the children and the slaves the premier place within Christian ethics. The

place of submission is the position that is, in a way, the preferred position. It is certainly safer. The place of being over others is the harder role. This may be indicated by the words of anger and frustration that Paul uses for husbands, fathers and masters. They seem to have a greater problem with anger and bitterness. In the case of the husbands, they are the ones that have to sacrifice themselves for the other. Surely to imitate Christ in his work for the church calls for greater self sacrifice than to be like the church that gets so lavishly cared for.

Our study shows that Paul sees natural relationships taken up in the Lord and structured by the Lord's relationship with his people. By no means does Paul suggest that in Christ a higher reality has come into being that leaves the lower reality of natural relationships behind or that devalues them. It might be contended that Paul is only dealing with relationships we live in while we have our mortal bodies. What about our resurrection life? Surely, the truth in Christ is ultimately defined by our resurrection life.

The first point we must make is that when Paul speaks about our life and action in the Lord he is referring to the risen Lord. Yes, wives are to be subject to their husbands as is fitting in the risen Lord (Col 3.18). The second point we must make is that there is a deep connection between our life in the body and our glory in the resurrection body. We see this first of all in Jesus. He was exalted in resurrection with the identity of what he was in his body of humiliation here on earth. The man on the throne at God's right hand is the man who walked on earth and humbled himself. In fact, he has his exalted glory as the Father's reward for his deep humiliation. Paul tells the slaves that they will receive their reward from the Lord (Col 3.24), and this reward will be given to them in the resurrection. In our resurrection life, we will have the glory that will display God's evaluation of what we were on earth. That which I do here in the body for the Lord and by his grace will be my reward then and will identify me then. So, while the slave on earth will not be a slave to a human master in heaven, he will shine with the glory of a glorified slave who pleased the Lord on earth. A believer who suffers for Christ on earth will not suffer in the glorified state, but he will have the glory produced by those sufferings (2Cor 4.17).

The resurrection life will not abolish what we have done for the Lord on earth. We will reign with Christ, but this will not make nothing of the fact that on earth we were subjects to other human beings for the sake of the Lord. Rather, in the resurrection life we will get the outcome for which we endured suffering and even harsh submission. The earthly relationships are presently taken up in the Lord and we are to live in the Lord. All will receive its true evaluation when the earthly relationships are past and we receive our eternal reward.

## **B. WHERE THERE IS NO MALE AND FEMALE**

If we lift out Paul's assertion in Gal 3.28, "there is no male and female," and take this as an absolute statement, we will pit it against all else that Paul says about gender. If we back off from raising this kind of war between statements in Paul's letters, we must ask, "Where is there no male and female?" In other words, to what does this statement apply? To answer this question we have to place the statement back into the verse and then anchor the verse into its context and determine what point the apostle is making within his larger discussion.

We will begin by getting an accurate translation of the text. Paul is lining up three distinctions: Jew/Greek, slave/free and male/female. Paul puts the first two into contrast. The Greek text reads: "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free." In the last couplet, Paul makes a change in the conjunction he uses. He writes, "There is no male and female." When speaking of the distinctions between Jews and Greeks and between slaves and the free, Paul uses a disjunctive conjunction and so divorces them. Indeed, a Jew held his status in separation from Gentiles. Paul expresses this in Gal 2.15. He boldly affirms the Jews' sense of identity as being Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles. To be a Jew was to be separate from Gentiles. The contrast between slave and free is also one of the free being defined in opposition to the slave. In both the case of the Jew and the free, one can and even prefers to hold his status in a group or society without the other side. But, this is not the case with male and female. In 1Cor 11.11-12 Paul points out that the one is not independent of the other. Paul's statement, "male and female," harks back to Gen 1.27 which says that God made them male and female, and this is inherent in God making man

in his image. So, in bringing in male and female, Paul must change his grammatical construction because male and female are inseparable. Before we comment on what Paul means that there is no male and female, we must determine what he is talking about. The issue in Galatians is neither that of slave and free nor that of male and female. He is dealing with the problem of Jew and Gentile. The question we must answer is, "In what sense is there neither Jew nor Greek?" This sense must then be applied to the question about male and female.

## **1. Setting up the discussion (Gal 2.11-21)**

Paul begins his doctrinal discussion in Galatians in 3.1ff. He sets up the issues for this discussion in Gal 2.11-21. There are two points that Paul presses. The first is that of the table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The second is the Jewish Christians' faith in Christ to be justified. We might put it this way: fellowship and conversion.

### **a. The practical issue: the question of table fellowship (Gal 2.11-14)**

Paul focuses on Peter's conduct because he was the apostle to the circumcision (Gal 2.7) though others were involved in the issue. When acting on his own, Peter had fellowship with Gentile believers at a common table. Most likely, the Lord's Supper as meal was involved, though the fellowship around a table would not be limited to this. Out of fear for those of the circumcision (i.e., Jews), Peter withdrew from the table fellowship with the Gentile Christians. What was at stake in this was the matter of Jewish identity. Paul presses the issue by beginning, "If you being a Jew, live in the manner of a Gentile and not in the manner of a Jew..." (v 14). To live in the manner of a Jew is to maintain the separation of the Jew from Gentiles. The Jewish identity is stated in v 15: "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles." By having table fellowship with Gentiles, Peter was not living in the manner of a Jew. In fact, he was living in the manner of Gentiles, i.e., not practicing separation. The Gentiles were not separated to God and so were not holy.

The table fellowship Peter enjoyed at first was a vivid statement that Gentiles did not have to become Jews by being circumcised and coming under the Law of Moses in order to be accepted in the community of faith in Christ. This meant that the fellowship in Christ was not based on or defined by Jewish identity and separation. It was based on faith in Christ and justification by that faith. Peter's about face turn also made a serious statement. It put the pressure on the Gentiles to judaize in order to be accepted within the community of believers (v 14). The message was that a Gentile as a Gentile, i.e., as uncircumcised and not keeping the Law of Moses, could not be a member in the community that is in Christ.

### **b. The theological issue: justification by faith (Gal 2.16-17)**

For Paul, the burning issue at stake in the matter of table fellowship was the gospel. Peter was not walking in a straight line toward the gospel (v 14a). In vv 16-17 Paul points this out. Paul along with Peter and others were Jews by nature and held their status in separation from Gentiles as sinners, i.e., without the covenant status in the Law. But, in their separate status they came to the conviction that they needed to be justified apart from the works of the Law by faith in Jesus Christ. In seeking this justification, they were found sinners (v 17a), i.e., with a status alongside the sinners of the Gentiles (v 15). This means that their status before God was off of the Jewish ground of separation from Gentiles.

### **c. Answering the theological conundrum (vv 17-21)**

For a Jew to step off of the ground of the Law was to become a sinner. It thus looked like Christ served sin. He seemed to increase the pool of sinners. Paul shows why this is not the case with two assertions which control his doctrinal discussion in 3.1-4.11. The first is that he died to the Law through the Law (v 19). In other words, the position of justification apart from the Law in which Paul stood was itself brought about

through the Law. The second assertion is that this transfer from under the Law took place through the cross of Christ (v 20).

In his doctrinal discussion, Paul will show that the Law has brought about the cross and in the cross the Law comes to the end of its role. This provides for the basis of justification by faith in Christ apart from the works of the Law (3.1-14) and for the one seed of promise that stands beyond the Law (3.15-29). The two sections in chapter 3 answer to the two concerns raised in Antioch. The discussion of 3.1-14 takes up the question of justification by faith in Christ apart from the works of the Law (2.15-16). The argument of 3.15-29 takes up the question of the oneness of those who have faith in Christ, and the practical side of that is the table fellowship (2.11-14).

## **2. Galatians 3**

We will not do a detailed study of Galatians 3. We will only indicate how the chapter falls into two sections that answer to the issues Paul raised in 2.11-21.

### **a. The scriptural case for justification by faith apart from the Law (Gal 3.1-14)**

In Gal 3.1 Paul turns from the Jewish Christians, whom he is addressing in 2.14-21, to the Gentile Christians of Galatia to whom he is writing. He begins with an appeal to their experience of receiving the Spirit and then turns to lay out the scriptural proof of the doctrine of justification by faith apart from the works of the Law.

This section is tightly and neatly organized. It forms a neat chiasm:

A1. The gift of the Spirit given to Gentiles (vv 1-5)

B1. The blessing of Abraham for the Gentiles (vv 6-9)

Paul makes the case for justification by faith in vv 6-7.  
He shows that this is the blessing of Abraham in vv 8-9.

C1. The curse of the Law for those who are of the works of the Law (vv 10-12)

Paul works with the opposites of blessing (vv 8-9) and curse (v 10).  
Verses 10-12 answer to vv 6-9 in reverse order:  
Justification by faith (vv 6-7)  
Blessing by faith (vv 8-9)  
Curse under the Law (v 10)  
No justification by the Law (vv 11-12)

C2. Christ and the curse (v 10)

Here Paul takes up his point that he died to the law through the law by the cross (2.19-20). Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us.

B2. The blessing of Abraham comes on the Gentiles (v 14a)

A1. The promise of the Spirit is given through faith (v 14b)

So Paul has returned to his opening theme in vv 1-5.

## **b. The realization of the seed of Abraham (vv 15-29)**

This section is not as neatly organized as vv 1-14. It is, however, a well integrated piece. We will simply point out the key themes that we must understand to interpret v 28 correctly.

In vv 15-18, Paul introduces the three themes that he will develop: promise, seed and inheritance. These three terms are brought together in v 29, his conclusion: you are Abraham's seed and that means you are heirs according to promise.

Galatians 3.28 touches on the theme of the seed, and this is indicated by the stress on being one. The point that Paul stresses about the seed to which the promises were spoken is that the seed is one in contrast to being many and that this one seed is Christ (v 16). It is Paul's mode of thinking in Galatians 3 to set the Law in direct contrast to the promise and the reception of the promise. In v 18 Paul sets the Law in opposition to the promise. Then in vv 19-20 he sets the mediation of the Law in contrast to the one, i.e., the singularity that defines the seed (v 16).

In v 20 Paul points out the feature of the mediator through whom the Law was given: the mediator is not of one. This sets the mediation of the Law in contrast to the oneness of the seed. In Greek Paul uses the definite article and speaks of "the mediator," referring specifically to Moses rather than to the concept of mediation. Paul is not spelling out the concept inherent in mediation—that a mediator goes between two parties. What he means is seen in the follow up line, "...whereas God is one." What Paul points to by the oneness of God is seen in Rom 3.29-30. God is one and that means that he is the God of all, Jews and Gentiles. The Law mediated by Moses does not establish this oneness. It makes God the God of the Jews and not of the Gentiles. Now, the Law of Moses makes clear that God is the only God there is, but the covenant relationship of the Law does not put all people on the same basis before God. It separates the Jewish people off from the Gentiles.

That our way of understanding Paul's affirmation that God is one is verified by Eph 4.4-6. The fact that there is one Spirit, one Lord and one Father establishes oneness on the human side.

The Law of Moses is a covenant. It is not a set of universal laws by which all people can equally relate to God. The Law set the Jews off from all other nations. No nation as a people group could enter this covenant, and individual Gentiles had to become Jews and so join the Jewish nation to enter the covenant. As much as it included Jews, the Law excluded all others. The gospel, in contrast, establishes a relationship between God and people that is universal. All people are placed on the universal footing of being sinners. All are called to come as sinners and receive justification from their sins. Faith in Christ is not what some have by nature in the way Jews were Jews by nature, by birthright. To be justified, Gentiles do not have to join the nation of people who are born Jews. One God relates to all equally, and that reflects the oneness of God.

Paul's argument in Gal 3.21-25 is that the Law served the promise in locking up all under sin and holding them for Christ, to be justified by faith. This moves the discussion from the Law to the theme of the one seed. So, now we will turn to our verse, Gal 3.28.

## **3. Galatians 3.28**

The concern of Galatians is not about slave and free or males and females. It is only about the relationship between Jew and Greek. So, we will have to determine what Paul means in Gal 3.28 by seeing how Paul's statement that "there is neither Jew nor Greek" functions within the discussion beginning with Gal 2.11.

**a. Neither Jew nor Greek**

It is commonly assumed that when Paul said that there is neither Jews nor Greek for all are one in Christ he means that the distinction between Jew and Greek is abolished in Christ. This is at best a very inaccurate interpretation of what Paul is saying.

Paul bases the whole discussion in Galatians on the real distinction between Jew and Gentile. In 2.14 he addresses Peter as a Jew: "If you being a Jew..." He says of the Jewish Christians, "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles" (2.15). Paul never suggests that Peter as a Christian and apostle was not a Jew. All that Paul demands in Gal 2.11ff. is that when it comes to fellowship in Christ the Jewish Christians not act like Jews, i.e., in separation from Gentile believers. We must also see the other side of Paul contention. Gentile believers are not to be forced to judaize.

The difference between Jews and Gentiles was built into the mission. The gospel to the uncircumcision (i.e., Gentiles viewed as non-Jews) was entrusted to Paul, and the gospel to the circumcision (i.e., Jews as marked off from Gentiles) was entrusted to Peter (2.7-9). In Rom 3.29-30 Paul points out that God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles in the difference of being circumcised and uncircumcised. He justifies both groups the same way, but he justifies them in their native difference. This is brought out forcefully in Rom 4.9-12. Through faith Abraham is the father of both the uncircumcised who believe and of the circumcised who believe, and this assures that the promise is guaranteed to all the seed (4.16). The Jews' distinct privileges are upheld in Rom 9.1-5, and the difference between the Jews as the natural branches and the Gentiles as wild branches is maintained when both types are grafted in the olive tree (Rom 11.17-24). Christian baptism did not replace Jewish circumcision. This is seen in the fact that Paul went ahead to circumcise Timothy who was already baptised. Circumcision put one into Israel and baptism does not do this. It is abundantly clear from Paul's letters that faith in Christ did not abolish the legitimate difference between Jew and Gentile.

Paul's contention in Galatians is that being a Jew, which means being circumcised and so a member of Israel, is not a condition for justification and membership in the promised seed of Abraham. As a result, Gentiles do not have to judaize in order to be justified and be in the one seed of Abraham in Christ. By the same token, Jews do not have to be Gentiles and so de-judaize in order to be justified.

Without removing from the Jewish Christians their Jewish identity, Paul does put them on a level with the Gentiles when it comes to justification. While the Jewish Christians were seeking to be justified in Christ, they found themselves to be sinners and so were on a par with the sinners from among the Gentiles (2.17). But, we must hear Paul accurately. He does not say that they became sinners, as if he were suggesting that to be justified by faith in Christ Jews have to abandon the Law. He says that they were found to be sinners, i.e., sinners all along under the Law. This is confirmed in 3.19ff. The Law came to make sin transgression (3.19; see 4.15). The OT scriptures that drew the conclusion of the Law shut up everyone under sin (3.22). The Jews who became believers in Christ found themselves to be sinners in their Jewish state under the Law. In this discovery, they became justified by faith apart from the works of the Law, and this put them into a new relationship with God that is not based on the works of the Law. Gentiles were defined as sinners with reference to Jewish separateness and so did not have to be found sinners in seeking to be justified. Because justification is given apart from the works of the Law, Gentiles who were naturally not under the Law of Moses can be justified on the basis of being Gentiles. In this justification, the Jewish and Gentile believers with their difference in status in relation to each other have one new status before God.

The one identity that Jews and Gentiles have in common through faith in Christ is not a matter of simply removing the difference between the two. This difference came about in the course of history through the Law. Paul does not have in mind a reversal of this differentiation so that they are brought back to a common human identity before the Law and circumcision were given. It is not the unity in basic humanity or in Adam. The one identity Paul has in mind is not the created identity. It is the new man, to use an expression from Paul. This one new man is not behind the difference between Jew and Gentile but beyond it. This new human being was brought about by Christ through his cross and in his resurrection (Eph 2.15). So, rather than thinking in terms of removing the differences that developed through history Paul is

speaking about a new and singular identity that was brought about by Christ. This new identity is beyond natural distinctions, but it does not abolish them.

At first this new identity may seem abstract. It is, however, real. It was brought about by the historical event of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The believer entered into a new relationship with God by faith and so began to relate to God through Christ. The new believer was told to put off the old man and put on the new man as his identity (Eph 4.20-24; Col 3.9-11). He carried this out in being baptised and putting on Christ the way one puts on a robe, and our clothes represent the way we present ourselves to be seen by others. The new identity becomes concrete as it determines how we live in the body. We live out the new man. It also becomes concrete in the practice of fellowship. Human beings are essentially social creatures and have a group identity. The new identity that all share makes all one people in Christ, and this is expressed in fellowship and the Lord's Supper.

In Gal 2.11-21 Paul deals with the practical realities of fellowship in this new identity. At one level, Jewish believers were still Jews and Gentile Christians remained Gentiles. But, in Christ they were one. This brought Peter into a tension, for his Jewish status involved separation from Gentiles (enforced by those of the circumcision) and his status in Christ united him with Gentile believers and called him to fellowship with them. Paul insisted that the truth in Christ control Peter. He must walk in line with the gospel (2.14). In his doctrinal discussion of chapter 3, Paul shows that this is also in line with the function of the Law which holds people for faith in Christ (3.11-25). This means that the Jewish Christian is the one who is true to the meaning and function of the Law (2.19-20). The point is very profound for Christians. The way the gospel calls Jewish believers to act in a manner that is not Jewish is true to the role of the Law. Becoming a believer does not undo the true meaning of being Jewish with a commitment to upholding the Law of Moses.

It might be helpful to look at the way the truth in Christ would have to be worked out in practical terms if in Christ the distinction between Jew and Gentile were abolished. How would one live out such an abolition? Would the Jewish Christian have to eat pork, become uncircumcised and live like a Gentile? In that case Peter could not have carried out a mission to Jews and Paul would not have had access to the synagogues. We know that Gentiles were not allowed to judaize. So, the only way of giving expression to the abolition would be to create a culture that is neither and both at the same time. The apostles never thought of such a hybrid culture. The beauty of the truth in Christ is that there is a unity that is not based on one or the other. It is not based on a commonality between the two or on a merging of the two. It is not ecumenical. The one identity is a new creation that unites the two with their differences. In fact, it is true to what it means to be a Jew and to be a Gentile. This is what we must bring forward to our understanding of the matter of male and female.

#### **b. Neither slave nor free**

In 1Cor 7.17-24 Paul moves from the question of circumcision and uncircumcision to that of slave and free just as he does in Gal 2.28. The two issues were seen to share a common concern. Both were a matter of one's status and raised the question of compatibility with one's position in Christ. 1Corinthians 7.21-23 shows that the status of being a slave and being bound to a human master was perceived to be incompatible with the fact that the believer is the Lord's freeman and has been purchased by Christ and so belongs to him alone. Paul's answer is that being a slave to a human master does not affect one's status in Christ. Also, being a free person in the sense that one is not a slave on earth does not define one's status in Christ. In Christ the slave is the Lord's freedman and the free person is Christ's slave.

Paul teaches that the status of a freedman is to be preferred. If the Christian slave is able to become free, he should do so (v 21). This is the apostle's advice. But, he gives the command, "Do not become slaves of men" on the basis that the Christian has been purchased by the Lord (v 23). Paul does not see an incompatibility between being a slave to a human master and belonging to Christ, but he regards choosing to be a slave to a human being as incompatible with the fact that the Christian belongs to the Lord. But, one's status in Christ is not affected by one's status on earth. One's identity in Christ is above one's identity in human relationships and can be lived out in those relationships.

The two sides of being a slave are brought out in Colossians. In Col 3.11 Paul says that there is no slave and freeman but Christ is all and in all. Without any sense of contradiction, however, Paul goes on to instruct the slaves to obey their masters on earth fearing the Lord. The service they give they are to give to the Lord from whom they will receive the reward of the inheritance (3.22-25). Christ not only gives the Christian slave an identity in which there is no distinction made between slave and free, he also orders the slave within his relationship to his earthly master and makes himself the real Lord of the Christian slave. Again we see that Paul does not think that having an identity in Christ in which the earthly distinctions are not found abolishes the earthly distinctions where they exist on earth.

We must return to Gal 3.28 and ask if Paul's assertion that there is neither slave or free has any specific relevance to the discussion in Galatians. In Galatians 4 Paul uses the status of a slave to depict those under the Law as having a spiritual status that is in direct contrast to and that is incompatible with the status of sons and being free in Christ. The apostle's denial in Gal 3.28 pre-empts any suggestion that the earthly status of being a slave undermines our identity in Christ.

### **c. No male and female**

Paul's last statement of denial in Gal 3.28 reaches back to Gen 1.27 which says that God made them male and female. The distinctions between Jew and Greek and slave and free developed in the course of history. This one, however, goes back to creation. By including male and female in Gal 3.28, Paul is making his point absolute. For believers Christ alone provides the identity so that all are one.

We must carry forward what we have seen with regard to Jew and Gentile and slave and free. The one identity we have in Christ does not abolish the distinct identities where they do indeed exist. Paul is not saying that the difference between male and female do not exist in Christ. Just like Paul does not go back to a common human identity prior to the time when the distinction between Jew and Gentile came about, so Paul does not have in mind an essential humanity that is behind the difference of gender. Such a common humanity has never existed. God did not make a bisexual being and split him apart. He made a male, Adam, and created the woman out of him. A genderless humanity is a fiction of the human mind, a mere abstraction.

In looking at what Paul says about slaves, we saw that he sees the Lord giving the Christian an identity in which there is no slave and freeman. At the same time, he sees the slave-master relationship in the Lord. The Lord both gives us our spiritual identity and relates us in our earthly relationships to him. The same is true of the male-female difference. There is one difference. The status of slave or free is not essential to life on earth. It is an economic relationship that is set up by mankind in a fallen world. The relationship of male and female was created and is essential to our existence on earth. We cannot get out of this one. A slave can become free but a male cannot become a woman or even worse (a more aberrant idea) genderless.

We should raise the question of the relevance of Paul's assertion that there is no male and female for the question of circumcision that is being discussed. In Judaism there was male and female. We should notice that this distinction is different from that of Jew and Gentile. In the latter case, it is a matter of separation, being Jew and not being Gentile. In the case of male and female, both were necessary within Israel, but they were aligned to the covenant in different ways.

In Judaism, only the males were circumcised, and this is telling for the way the covenant relationship was passed on. Membership in Israel was passed on through the fathers. The wives took on the husband's membership in his tribe. This answers to the fact that Israel was a nation and membership in it was primarily by birth. The status ran through the natural family, under the male head. In Christ it is different. Each person in Christ is directly related to God through Christ and receives the Spirit. Membership in Christ is not due to natural birth but by faith, the faith by which we are justified. Our identity in Christ is not passed on to us from a human channel. It is given to us directly in Christ. This is expressed in baptism. Unlike circumcision where only the males were circumcised, each believer is to be baptised and put on Christ.

The status that we have as the seed of Abraham is that of heir, and it is the son and not the daughter in the Bible that is the heir. Paul develops this side of the truth in chapter 4. When he affirms that there is no male and female, he is precluding any idea that the males hold any special status as sons. The women in the Lord are also sons (3.26).

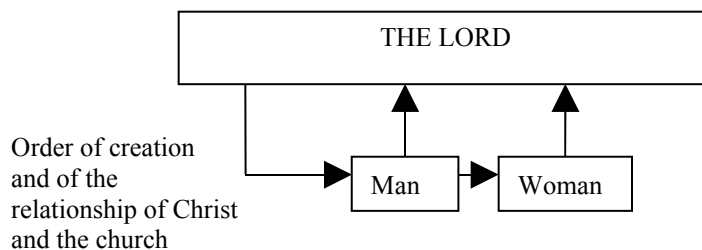
### C. DOCTRINAL PERSPECTIVE

We have seen two sides to Paul’s teaching on the natural differences among people. The one side comes straight out of the gospel. We not justified on the basis of what we are or by our association with a human group (Israel, family or church). We are justified by faith in Christ and so have our identity directly from him. This is above and beyond all human identities, even of our basic humanity in Adam. The other side comes from the realities of life on earth. We live in a world of nations and cultures (Col 3.11 includes this), we must work within economic relationships and we have gender. If justification concerns our vertical relationship, these social identities exist in our lateral relationships.

Our Lord Jesus Christ relates to us in both the vertical and lateral relationships. In the vertical relationship he gives each the same identity in him. So, the man and the woman both have the same identity and status. The woman does not derive her status in Christ from the man. The Christian wife is a believer even if her husband is not. Her faith in Christ is above her relationship with her husband (1Cor 7.12-16). Both husband and wife must be directly related to the Lord by faith. They are not justified as a unit. Each receives the Spirit personally. Each is baptized on his or her own. In the language of Galatians three, both the Christian male and female are sons of God, heirs according to promise and in the seed of Abraham. Both have their place in the church, the body of Christ and both partake of the Lord’s Supper.

Jesus is the direct Lord of both the believing man and woman. He is also the Lord who structures their relationship with each other, and in this the two are to act directly under the Lord. The Lord has this role because he is the one through whom all things were created and in whom all things are held together. For Christians, the structural relationships of life in the world are held together by him. When people come to faith in Christ, their relationships come under his Lordship and he orders the relationships. Both parties in a relationship must relate directly under the Lord. In the case of marriage, the husband must act from the Lord to his wife representing Christ and seeking the good of the wife as that is defined by Christ. The wife relates directly to the Lord in the way she relates to her husband. The balance of the relationship between the husband and the wife is set in the creation of gender, and we must keep in mind that all things that were created were made through the Son. So, the relationship between male and female is not limited to marriage.

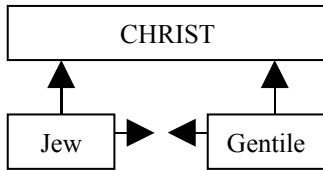
We can lay out the dual relationships in the Lord as follows:



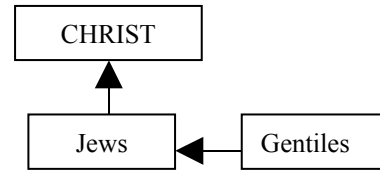
The way the vertical and horizontal relationships are held together in the Lord is a part of basic orthodoxy. Christian orthodoxy is centered in the truth of Christ. It is basic to Christian doctrine that Jesus is both creator and saviour and in him creation and redemption are held together. The human mind finds it hard to keep things together and in the right order, and out of this heresies arise.

The first heresy that threatened the church was the doctrine that reinterpreted the gospel to cause Gentile Christians to judaize. Paul fought this heresy in Galatians and taught the orthodoxy in Romans. This heresy took the lateral relationship between Jews and Gentiles as its measure and sought to subordinate the vertical relationship to it. Rather than seeing each person (both Jews and Gentiles) as directly before God in Christ, it wanted to align God to the world through Israel and have people justified by faith in Christ through membership in Israel. We can lay out the difference in alignment as follows:

**Paul's gospel**



**Judaizers' doctrine**



As far as we can tell, Paul effectively put down the judaizing heresy in the church. The apostles in Jerusalem stood by him, and this left the judaizers without any apostolic support. They were driven to the fringes.

Later another type of heresy began to develop which showed itself in Asia Minor and is in the background of Colossians and 1 and 2 Timothy. This heresy is Gnostic in type. It tended to run away with the vertical relationship (though not as taught by the apostles) and leave the realities of the physical world and the lateral relationships outside of the redemption in Christ. When applied to the question of male and female, this involves asserting the spiritual identity and abandoning the created differences and relationship between man and woman.

Apostolic teaching holds the two relationships in balance as they are united in the work of Christ who is both creator and saviour. The way the realities of the created order and of the new creation are held together in the person and work of Christ must be held as the standard of orthodoxy. To give it up is to make shipwreck theologically and has disastrous ethical consequences. This will be seen in the area of sexual ethics which we will look at in the next seminar.