

## GALATIANS 3:28: BIBLICAL EQUALITY AND TODAY'S MESSIANIC MOVEMENT

GALATIANS 3:28 – MULTIPLE VERSIONS
<p>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (KJV).</p>
<p>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 (NASU).</p>
<p>There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (NIV).</p>
<p>There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (NRSV).</p>
<p>there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female; for in union with the Messiah Yeshua, you are all one (CJB).</p>
<p>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 (ESV).</p>
GALATIANS 3:28 – GREEK
<p><i>ouk eni Ioudaios oude Hellēn, ouk eni doulos oude eleutheros, ouk eni arsen kai thēlu pantes gar humeis heis este en Christō Iēsou.</i></p> <p>οὐκ ἐν Ἰουδαίῳ οὐδὲ Ἑλλην, οὐκ ἐν δούλῳ οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερῳ, οὐκ ἐν ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.</p>

**Galatians 3:28 is one of the most important verses not only in the Apostolic Scriptures, but in the entire Bible.** This one verse written by the Apostle Paul speaks of a new status for human beings that has been inaugurated via the sacrificial work of Yeshua, as God’s people are to be united as “one person” (NEB), actively accomplishing His tasks in the Earth. At times, we do find Galatians 3:28 quoted among those in our Messianic faith community, but its ramifications are not often fully considered or probed for their significant spiritual power. Current and severe developments in the Messianic movement in our day—with the future steadily looming—require that we take a fresh look at this verse, what its message of equality means for us, and things that we are certainly missing as we seek to be those who are useful in the Lord’s work. This single verse asks us many difficult questions about both Biblical equality *and* why the Messianic community seems to have less unity and more rivalry.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GALATIANS 3:28—PAUL’S SUBVERSION

While he may be moderate on a selection of other issues, the Apostle Paul is by no means moderate when it comes to the required unity of all Believers in Yeshua (Jesus). He forthrightly states, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female—for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua” (TLV). Three categories of people are listed in this verse:

1. nationalities
2. slave/free status
3. gender

These various conditions are to have absolutely no bearing when it comes to being “one” in the Lord. The availability of salvation in Yeshua, and the subsequent unity to follow – goes beyond all ethnic, social, and gender barriers.

Galatians 3:28 carries some profound significance for us today, which all sectors of the worldwide Body of Messiah tend to struggle with. Paul’s argument is not that the natural ethnic, social or employment, and gender barriers and distinctions present among people all go away, because they do not. Instead, Paul’s argument is that a strong degree of unity should prevail, considering that *all human beings* are naturally sinners in the eyes of God and require the atonement of His Son for salvation. Jews are still Jews, and Greeks are still Greeks. Some have a high socio-economic status, and others a low socio-economic status. Males certainly do not stop being males, nor females being females. But Yeshua and who He is, are to be the focus of one’s faith or religious experience, and all are to be unified around the common hope we have in Him.

Paul’s words, favoring this kind of “radical” unity for Believers in Yeshua, take on great significance when viewed against the backdrop of knowing that proselytes to Judaism were not often treated as equal members of the Synagogue. The Mishnah indicates a common occurrence, that “when he [the proselyte] prays in private, he says, ‘God of the fathers of Israel.’ And when he prays in the synagogue, he says, ‘God of your fathers’” (m.*Bikkurim* 1:4).<sup>1</sup> Paul’s attitude runs completely contrary to this when he tells the Corinthians, a mixed group of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, “our fathers<sup>2</sup> were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1). The Patriarchs of Israel are considered to be the “ancestors” (NRSV) of the non-Jewish Believers, every bit as much as the Jewish Believers. Whether the redeemed in Yeshua be of physical Israel or not, all who look to the God of Israel partake of the great spiritual heritage of Israel, and are considered as though they participated in the Exodus. For as the Lord told Pharaoh, the plagues He dispensed upon Egypt were for the entire Earth to understand:

“For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth<sup>3</sup>” (Exodus 9:14).

The kind of unity of which Paul speaks in Galatians 3:28 had little precedence in either a First Century Jewish or Hellenistic context.

One does not have to go that far to see that a common prayer in the Jewish *siddur* (based in t.*Berachot* 6:18), often recited during morning prayers, follows the exact same categories of nationality, socio-economic status, and gender – *and in the same order* – that Paul lists in Galatians 3:28. The observant Jew proclaims, as it appears in a relatively modern resource like *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*,

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast not made me a **heathen** [*nakri*, נַכְרִי].

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast not made me a **bondman** [*aved*, עֶבֶד].

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast not made me a **woman** [*ishah*, אִשָּׁה].<sup>4</sup>

*While men are to declare the third stanza, women are to instead declare, “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe who hast made me according to thy will.”<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Wenig Rubenstein and David Weiner, trans., Neusner, *Mishnah*, 167.

<sup>2</sup> Grk. *hoi pateres hēmōn pantes* (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν πάντες).

<sup>3</sup> Heb. *b’kol-ha’eretz* (בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph H. Hertz, ed., *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, revised (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1960), pp 19, 21; cf. Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *Complete ArtScroll Siddur, Nusach Ashkenaz* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1984), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Heb. *she’asani k’retzunu* (שֶׁעָשָׂה לִּי כְרִצּוֹנוֹ).

<sup>6</sup> Hertz, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, 21.

Paul counters and subverts all three of these categories, saying that to a significant degree that they are unimportant to the Lord, **as all people have been affected by Yeshua's sacrifice** (3:26-27). A Jewish person, reading the Epistle to the Galatians, should have had a very good idea about the kind of equality and unity Paul was advocating. At the same time, a non-Jewish Greek or Roman could have also been impacted by this as well. A statement attributed to Thales and Socrates is seen in the classical work *Vitae Philosophorum* (1.33), and says,

...that I was born a human being and not a beast, next, a man and not a woman, thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian...<sup>7</sup>

Noting the distinctions seen in the traditional Jewish prayer, F.F. Bruce indicates, "It is not unlikely that Paul himself had been brought up to thank God he was born a Jew and not a Gentile, a freeman and not a slave, a man and not a woman. If so, he takes up each of these three distinctions which had considerable importance to Judaism and affirms that in Christ they are all irrelevant."<sup>8</sup> G. Walter Hansen also concludes how "This radical affirmation of unity and equality in Christ is a deliberate rejection of the attitude expressed by the synagogue prayer in which the worshiper thanks God for not making him a Gentile, a slave or a woman."<sup>9</sup>

Lest we think Paul is railing against his own Jewish heritage as somehow being meaningless, his remarks also affected some pagan Hellenistic views of distinctions among people as well. Paul desired a great unity among all human beings because of the sacrificial work of Yeshua the Messiah for sinners—Jewish and non-Jewish, slave and free, male and female—that as of his time would largely have not been considered possible in whatever sphere one was living. Yet, as special and unique creatures made in His image (Genesis 1:26; 9:6; James 3:9), every person has a great value which is to now be fully realized that Messiah Yeshua and His salvation have come!

(Admittedly, when some of today's Messianic Believers encounter the traditional Jewish prayer, where a male Jewish person thanks God for *not being* a Gentile pagan or a female—people can get offended. It has to be recognized that this prayer in total has been largely maintained only in Orthodox Jewish *siddurim*. The Conservative Jewish *Siddur Sim Shalom* has changed much of this, only including the declaration "Praised are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe, making me a Jew" [although the Hebrew is actually *Yisrael, יִשְׂרָאֵל*] and "making me free.")<sup>10</sup>

## “NEITHER JEW NOR GREEK”

The first of the categories Paul lists in Galatians 3:28 is *ouk eni Ioudaios oude Hellēn* (οὐκ ἐνι Ἰουδαίος οὐδὲ Ἑλλην), "**There is neither Jew nor Greek.**" Do note that the source text does not say "**there is neither Jew nor Gentile**" (CJB), as both *Ioudaios* and *Hellēn* are proper nationalities, and no one would dream of rendering *Ioudaios* as anything other than "Jew," "Jewish," or even "Judean."

In his epistles, the Apostle Paul is absolutely magnanimous about the great honor that God has bestowed upon his own Jewish people, saying in Romans 3:1-2, "what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect.<sup>11</sup> First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God." Yet Paul is also quite respectful of other societies and cultures, as demonstrated by his aptitude to write letters according to First Century classical conventions, and he often used Mediterranean forms of argumentation

<sup>7</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, Vol. 41 (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1990), 157.

<sup>8</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 187.

<sup>9</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Galatians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 113; Cf. Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), pp 84-85.

<sup>10</sup> Jules Harlow, ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2007), 65.

<sup>11</sup> Grk. *polu kata panta tropon* (πολύ κατά πάντα τρόπον), "Considerable in every way" (HCSB).

that would have been familiar with his diverse audiences (albeit infused with Hebraic concepts from the Tanach).<sup>12</sup>

Yeshua the Messiah said of the Apostle Paul, “he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (Acts 9:15), and anyone who has read his letters in any detail can see that he had the ability as both a Pharisee and Roman citizen to bridge the gulf between two very diverse ancient worlds. Paul never cast aside the significance of his Jewish heritage, but in Galatians 3:28 he certainly wants his audience—either Jewish or Greek—to see the value that one has toward the other, as both are a part of the family of humanity. For the time had come, as he later says to those assembled at the Areopagus in Athens, “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30, TNIV), as the gospel was to clearly go out to *tois anthrōpois pantas* (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντα) or all human beings. And in this scene Paul demonstrates a respect toward other cultures, quoting the Sicilian Aratus, who said “For we also are His children” (Acts 17:28).<sup>13</sup>

With the gospel message of salvation preparing to change the world—as Yeshua commissioned His Disciples to go “to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8) as a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6)—Jewish and Greek Believers as mentioned in Galatians 3:28 were dependent on one another. *Both groups* had something to add to not only the diversity of the Body of Messiah, but also to one another that could enhance God’s mandate of making a difference in the world and being effective in His service.

What might this mean for us today? If Paul could see value not only in his own Jewish heritage, but also in some of the sentiments of pagan philosophers who did not know the God of Israel—*how much more value* is there in societies and cultures that have been positively impacted by the gospel and have recognized the God of Israel? In a quest to recapture our Hebraic and Jewish Roots, have some Messianics possibly forgotten the positive things brought to human civilization by Christendom? I know that I have found myself, perhaps jokingly sometimes, paraphrasing 1 Corinthians 1:22 as “Jews seek signs, Greeks seek wisdom, **and Scots seek pragmatism**”—per some of the unique contributions, both philosophical and theological, of my primary ethnic heritage to the world. And, many of you can no doubt add a line or two about your own cultural background there as well. There are, in fact, many positive qualities of cultures where the gospel has been spread, which can help and improve the mission and outreach of today’s Messianic movement.

### “NEITHER SLAVE NOR FREE”

The second category listed by Paul in Galatians 3:28 is *ouk eni doulos oude eleutheros* (οὐκ ἐνὶ δούλῳ οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος), “**there is neither slave nor free.**” Most of us living in the Twenty-First Century are at a serious disadvantage of being able to understand this when set within the framework of the First Century, because slavery is not practiced in the West and is today considered to be abhorrent and uncivilized. Failing to understand slavery in both its ancient Mediterranean and Ancient Near Eastern contexts has often led to some eisegesis practiced where more modern ideas regarding slavery, largely impacted by the historical practice in the American South and history of the Civil War, are imported into the Bible.

The Torah’s regulations regarding “slavery” largely relate to one’s economic status and inability to cover debt (regardless of race or ethnicity).<sup>14</sup> G.H. Haas notes, “Israelites who must sell themselves into bondservice (because of personal impoverishment or inability to pay a debt or a fine) are not permitted to be treated like foreign slaves. They may not be sold as chattel slaves to other masters. Their time of service to fellow Israelites is limited to six years, and to resident aliens it is limited to the Jubilee Year.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, being a “slave” in the Roman context may have extended some strong privileges to a person, not present among average people.

<sup>12</sup> Note that this would have all been consistent with his Rabbinical training as a member of the School of Hillel (cf. Acts 22:3), which often had close dealings with the Roman government (b.*Sotah* 49b).

<sup>13</sup> Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1803.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, both the Hebrew *eved* (עֶבֶד) and Greek *doulos* (δούλος) can be rendered as either “slave” or “servant,” contingent on context.

<sup>15</sup> G.H. Haas, “Slave, Slavery,” in T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 781.

While the condition of each Roman slave needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis, *ABD* summarizes that some played very important functions:

“Central features that distinguish 1st century slavery from that later practiced in the New World are the following: racial factors played no role; education was greatly encouraged (some slaves were better educated than their owners) and enhanced a slave’s value; many slaves carried out sensitive and highly responsible social functions; slaves could own property (including other slaves!); their religious and cultural traditions were the same as those of the freeborn; no laws prohibited public assembly of slaves; and (perhaps above all) the majority of urban and domestic slaves could legitimately anticipate being emancipated by the age of 30.”<sup>16</sup>

When one reviews the Torah instructions regarding slavery, one sees that male and female slaves were expected to participate in the Passover (Exodus 12:44; cf. Genesis 17:13), rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:14), live wherever they please (Deuteronomy 23:15-16), and severe penalties are placed upon masters who abuse their slaves (Exodus 21:20-27). This kind of treatment was largely not seen in the Ancient Near East, “where the people were defined as subjects of their king whose rule was mythologically grounded in the gods or who had some political right to rule over them.”<sup>17</sup> A majority of “slaves” that we see in Ancient Israel are what would be better defined as indentured servants in financial straits, who indeed had certain rights. Certainly, as one moves forward in ancient history, different ways of exiting such straits became available as economies and banking systems would become more advanced, and people could actually get “jobs” in the more cosmopolitan sense of the word.

I would concede that Paul, as the widely Hillelite, open-minded Pharisee that he was, saw the day when members of the community of Believers in Yeshua would never have to sell themselves into such servitude. Instead, they would be treated as fellow brothers and sisters, and the *ekklēsia* would provide for their needs so they would never have to pay off their debts in such a way. Acts 2:45 attests that the first Believers “sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.” Paul’s instruction to Philemon regarding the runaway slave Onesimus is, “perhaps he was for this reason separated *from you* for a while, that you would have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord” (Philemon 15-16).

Much is lost for Bible readers, if they fail to consider where the Torah’s instructions regarding slavery came into direct conflict with the law codes of Ancient Israel’s neighbors. When anything is said by Paul about slavery, especially here in Galatians 3:28, we have to understand that the Torah’s commandments on slavery were quite subversive for their day in either the Fifteenth or Thirteenth Century B.C.E. when the Torah was codified. Paul would recognize that improvements in economy would give way for the need for persons to never have to sell themselves into servitude. Yet, in God’s continuing plan of salvation history, was it always His intention for people to be able to sell themselves into servitude to pay off debts? Was it His intention for any person to actually own the life of another? If all persons, regardless of whether they are slaves or free, require redemption—then should we not treat one another equally as recipients of redemption?

Today, we largely live in societies and cultures where slavery has been abolished and where automation, machines and robots, have taken over the jobs once given to slaves. In finding a more modern application of “**neither slave nor free**,” one does run the risk of reading something into Galatians 3:28. Yet, when slavery is understood in its ancient context of primarily regarding repayment of debt, “**neither slave nor free**” can easily be extrapolated as regarding one’s socio-economic status. People in ancient times only sold themselves into slavery as a *last ditch effort* to pay off debts. It might be said that one social status just above slavery was being poor, and in Galatians 2:10 Paul attests that remembering the poor was “the very thing I also was eager to do.” Yeshua’s word was, “For you always have the poor with you...” (Matthew 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8).

In the Body of Messiah, it can be very difficult for one not to choose favorites when considering socio-economic status, because people naturally gravitate to those with whom they share the most in common. Some have more wealth than others. Some wear nicer clothes. Some are more sophisticated. *Some give larger*

<sup>16</sup> S. Scott Bartchy, “Slavery (Greco-Roman),” in *ABD*, 6:66.

<sup>17</sup> Haas, “Slave, Slavery,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, 780.

*tithes*. Each one of us is still human, and while some might have the ability to commit “more elaborate” or “expensive” sin—sin is still sin! James the Just warns against those who would discriminate against poor people, saying,

“[I]f a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?” (James 2:2-4).

Someone who adheres to Paul’s words of “**neither slave nor free**” is not going to look at one’s socio-economic status for a basis of how one is treated or shown respect. However, this is a problem for many religious people, including Messianics. Those who are mature in faith, and are being molded by the Holy Spirit, will not be those who look to one’s socio-economic status for recognizing fellow Believers as both created and highly valued by God, saved by His grace. For as it is often and validly said: *We cannot buy our way into Heaven!* Both poor and rich, slave and free, can only enter in the same way via the salvation offered in Yeshua.

### “NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE”

The third and final category listed by Paul in Galatians 3:28 is *ouk eni arsen kai thelu* (οὐκ ἐνι ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ), “**there is neither male nor female.**” Paul lists this last because without any doubt this kind of equality would have been *the most radical* for not only his time, but even well until today. What does it mean that the genders are equal in Messiah Yeshua? This is a significant question that evangelical Christianity is presently debating, and one which today’s emerging Messianic movement must recognize as it grows and is forced to deal with issues of modernity and post-modernity, and whether or not Messianic women have a significant role to play within the administration and instruction of the Body of Messiah.

From Genesis 1:27, we see that “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (NRSV).<sup>18</sup> Many will assume that God’s creation of the male first, indicates that God favors the male gender over the female gender. But note that “The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man” (Genesis 2:22). Eve was made from Adam’s midsection or *tzeila* (צֵילָא), not from Adam’s ankle implying subservience, or from Adam’s neck implying dominance. According to Adam, his wife Eve was “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23), implying that she was every bit as much as him, except for the obvious anatomical differences for reproduction. In the ideal state from the beginning of Creation, both man and woman were to serve one another as equals, relying on one another, while respecting one another where they were different.

God’s creation of the male first, and His own portrayal as male in Genesis, directly combated pagan teaching of the Ancient Near East where the first humans were birthed by a mother goddess. This is seen in Mesopotamian mythology as such *Atrahasis*:

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<sup>18</sup> Do note that I am a moderate advocate of Believers using inclusive language, hence my reference to the NRSV in this verse, which renders *adam* (אָדָם) as “humankind,” followed by the TNIV as “human beings” (and similarly with *anthrōpos*, ἄνθρωπος throughout the Apostolic Scriptures).

Belet-ili the womb-goddess is present –  
 Let her create primeval man  
 So that he may bear the yoke [(   )],  
 So that he may bear the yoke, [the work of Ellil],  
 Let man bear the yoke of the gods!

(gap)

'Belet-ili the womb-goddess is present,  
 Let the womb-goddess create offspring,  
     And let man bear the load of the gods!  
 They called up the goddess, asked  
 The midwife of the gods, wise Mami,  
     'You are the womb-goddess (to be the) creator of mankind!  
     Create primeval man, that he may bear the yoke!  
 Let him bear the yoke, the work of Ellil,  
 Let man bear the load of the gods!'<sup>19</sup>

In this mythological account of Creation, we not only see that humanity is birthed by the womb-goddess, but that people are created solely to serve as the slaves of the gods. The Genesis 1-3 account runs completely contrary to this, as man and woman are made by the Lord *ex nihilo* or out of nothing, with Hebrews 11:3 further saying that “what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” Females must join with males in order to conceive a child, similar to how the womb-goddess must give birth. But from the Biblical point of view, God portrayed as male cannot give birth. On the contrary, He must create the first two human beings out of nothing, and He places them in the Garden of Eden to commune with Him (Genesis 2:8) as His special image bearers (Genesis 1:26-27), **not** making them His “slaves.” While in the Garden of Eden, the first man and the first woman were equals; as a direct result of the Fall, this equality was undeniably lost (Genesis 3:16).

The story that we see in the Torah, however, is a steady progression back toward the equal status of the genders that was originally seen in Eden. The Pentateuchal legislation is radical in the extreme once again, among the law codes of the Ancient Near East, as it does not at all treat women as simply property to be bought or sold. In an era where property could only be transferred to and from men, the daughters of Zelophehad went before Moses in the wilderness, as their father died without any sons. The Lord grants Moses the right to say, “If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter” (Numbers 27:8). The daughters were given the right to the *achuzat nachalah* (אֲחֻזַּת נַחֲלָה) or “hereditary possession” (Numbers 27:7). Ronald B. Allen makes the important observation, “The point seems to be that not only would they receive the property, they could transfer it to their heirs as well. Thus they share with the sons of the other fathers who were deceased. It is as though their father had had sons!”<sup>20</sup> Such rights were simply unheard of among Israel’s contemporaries during this period, unless one was a female member of a ruling family (and hence either divine or semi-divine).

Also significant to the Pentateuch is that the Lord asks males among His people not to have sexual relations during a woman’s menstrual cycle (Leviticus 20:18). While some might consider such a request to be burdensome, per our “sexually liberated” post-modernist world, this is actually quite respectful to the woman. The period of a woman’s menstruation is one of the most uncomfortable times of the month for her. Far be it from sexual intercourse being something that can be practiced *whenever couples want*, the Torah does place some restrictions on it so it can be a very rewarding, fulfilling, and indeed pleasurable time between a husband and wife. This is why J.H. Hertz is able to rightly assert, “While recognizing the sacred nature of the

<sup>19</sup> Stephanie Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp 14-15ff.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald B. Allen, “Numbers,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:943.

estate of wedlock, Judaism prescribes continence even in marriage...It categorically demands reserve, self-control, and moral freedom in the most intimate relations of life. It ordains the utmost consideration for the wife...throughout the monthly period.”<sup>21</sup>

This particular sexual prohibition in the Torah forces the husband to actually respect his wife as a fellow human being and an equal person. Women are by no means to be treated as sex objects in the Torah, a venue by which a man is only to find physical fulfillment. Males in the Torah are intended to have a permanent reminder on their penises via their circumcision, as a memorial sign of God’s covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-11). While a sign that they are connected to the Patriarch, John Goldingay is right to remind us, “it does draw attention to the need for their sexual activity to be disciplined and dedicated to God....Men [often] fail in this realm of their lives” and thus “The covenant sign becomes the covenant indictment and the covenant shame upon men. It is a mark of failure as much as a mark of status.”<sup>22</sup> It is up to the man to determine whether the *ot b’rit* (אֵיזֶת בְּרִית) is a sign of honor or dishonor upon him.

Of course, throughout the Tanach, we see a significant number of women, in addition to just men, playing important roles in God’s plan of salvation history—including some women in positions of critical leadership. Heroines such as Deborah (Judges 4-5) and Ruth are certainly godly women to be considered as models of service. The very holiday of *Purim* is commemorated because Queen Esther was in the right place at the right time, as the Jewish people were saved from extermination. The Tanach portrays women as very critical members of God’s community.

One practice that is by no means condoned by the Torah, yet came as a direct result of the Fall, was polygamy—men having multiple wives. With the creation of the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden, the ideal state has been for marriage to be between one man and one woman: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), a principle upheld by Yeshua the Messiah (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8; cf. 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31). Leviticus 18:18 is a clear example of an explicit Torah commandment against polygamy: “While your wife is living, do not marry her sister and have sexual relations with her, for they would be rivals” (NLT). It is true that various Patriarchs and monarchs of Israel did have multiple wives, and seemingly did not incur any significant penalties from the Lord for doing so. This must be counterbalanced with the fact that the whole nation of Israel was commanded to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days each year (Leviticus 23:33-34), and Nehemiah says that “The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day<sup>23</sup>” (Nehemiah 8:17)—which was after the Babylonian exile! The Ancient Israelites did not always follow the commands of God, although because of His great love and grace He often overlooked their significant transgressions. The witness of the Tanach is that severe chastisement to Israel often did not come until idolatry, child sacrifice, and outright rebellion against the Lord were practiced.

From a practical standpoint, while we see polygamy observed by some members of Israelite society, it is far fetched to think that every single Israelite man could economically afford more than one wife. On the contrary, the fact that only Patriarchs, leaders, and monarchs of Israel are portrayed as having multiple wives, demonstrates how little this practice was actually observed. And was it really worth it for them? When we read that Jacob had both Leah and Rachel as his wives, or David and Solomon had multiple wives—were their families places of genuine love and affection, or riddled with relational problems? Were their children behaved or unruly? 1 Kings 11:4 is not very good evidence in favor of polygamy: “For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God.” A significant reason Ancient Israel was ultimately divided into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms goes back to Solomon’s incessant polygamy, and the state-funded idolatry he sponsored. It is no surprise why Deuteronomy 17:17 says of Israel’s kings, “He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away.”

<sup>21</sup> Hertz, *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, 491.

<sup>22</sup> John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), pp 202, 203.

<sup>23</sup> Heb. *ad ha’yom ha’hu* (עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה).

This probably pertains to the whole assembly of people observing Tabernacles, not intermittent groups of people.



The Apostolic Scriptures make it abundantly clear that polygamy is something which is *not to be practiced by the people of God today*. The significant passages in the Gospels where Yeshua addresses marriage, affirm Genesis' teaching on one man and one woman (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18). The Apostle Paul states candidly in 1 Corinthians 7:2, "each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband." He also instructs Timothy that the male overseers/bishops and deacons only be allowed one wife (1 Timothy 3:2, 12). Furthermore, and perhaps most significant, Paul asserts in Ephesians 5:21-33 that the institution of marriage is to be a reflection on the Messiah's service for the *ekklēsia*. This involves the Lord serving a single body of people, *not* multiple bodies of people.

Given the new status for males and females that the arrival of Yeshua has inaugurated, as described by Paul in Galatians 3:28, polygamy is a practice that is degrading to the equality of the sexes which He has restored. In many cases, trying to Biblically justify polygamy—as though it is a good thing that God intended from Creation—is **almost always used as a way for men to fulfill sexual urges that cannot be kept under control**. Women are frequently the victims of such inappropriate and ungodly behavior often because of men who want to treat them as little more than chattel. Historically since the First Century, what we often witness in religious circles is that cultic leaders and personalities are those who practice it and it leads to great abuse and many scandals.<sup>24</sup>

Marriage is Biblically intended to be between one man and one woman, and as the author of Hebrews so aptly states, "Marriage *is to be held* in honor among all, and the *marriage bed is to be undefiled*" (Hebrews 13:4). Sexual intercourse among married couples is to not solely be for the purpose of reproduction, but for a husband and wife to really understand what Adam said of Eve: *etzem m'atzamay u'basar m'besari* (רֵבֶשֶׁת מִבְּשָׂרִי וְרֵבֶשֶׁת מִעֲצָמַי), "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). There is to be pleasure in appropriate sex, and a true oneness in marriage is to teach a husband and wife about the mystery of Yeshua's service for His Body. And in case anyone was wondering, consenting married couples are given a great freedom in the bedroom, provided the sexual estate is properly honored and considered.<sup>25</sup>

A Biblical marriage is to be a partnership of one man and one woman, united in common cause as Adam and Eve were originally intended to tend the Garden of Eden together. Certainly within marriage there are natural gender differences, as men are often bigger and stronger than women requiring them to protect their wives, and women have been made by God to give birth to children. Still, men are entirely expected to keep themselves under sexual control, as not only a significant way to honor their wives, but to honor the God who created sexual intercourse as a sacred institution. In 1 Corinthians 7:4, Paul directs those in marriage, "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*." This is a perfect portrayal of a husband and wife honoring one another as equals (cf. Ephesians 5:33).

What does the assertion of "**there is neither male nor female**" made by Paul do for the First Century recipients of Galatians? One of the main views of women that is encountered in the First Century Jewish world, at least, is noted by the historian Josephus:

"[F]or, says the Scripture, 'A woman is inferior to her husband in all things.' Let her, therefore, be obedient to him; not so, that he should abuse her, but that she may acknowledge her duty to her husband; for God has given the authority to the husband..." (*Against Apion* 2.201).<sup>26</sup>

Of course, while Josephus references the Tanach Scriptures to claim that wives are inferior to their husbands, "This text is nowhere in our present copies of the Old Testament."<sup>27</sup> However, the remark, that wives are inferior to their husbands, was an unfortunate cultural phenomenon present in the Jewish world at

<sup>24</sup> For a further evaluation of this issue, consult the author's article "Is Polygamy for Today?" Also useful for a discussion of related subjects, is the article "Addressing the Frequently Avoided Issues Messianics Encounter in the Torah."

<sup>25</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 720 is entirely correct to say of Hebrews 13:4, "This verse permits considerable variety in sexual activity between husband and wife, so long as both agree...; the notion that God requires the so-called 'missionary position' is fiction, a limitation that Christians of the past imposed upon themselves. There are a number of popular books about the New Testament's approach to marriage, sex and family. On the other hand, although the Bible encourages sexual fulfillment, it does not condone promiscuity."

<sup>26</sup> *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 806.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

the time of Yeshua and the Apostles. The Apostle Paul was an advocate for women to actively serve and be valued in the Body of Messiah. John R.W. Stott makes the astute observation,

“Women were nearly always despised in the ancient world, even in Judaism, and not infrequently exploited and ill-treated as well. But here the assertion is made that in Christ male and female are one and equal—and made by Paul who is ignorantly supposed by many to have been an anti-feminist.”<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps most significant to consider is that the new status of equality for males and females has widely opened the door for women to be leaders and teachers in the *ekklēsia*—one of the most controversial ideas that evangelical Christianity is currently struggling with, and undoubtedly soon the Messianic movement.<sup>29</sup> Considering Paul’s broad-sweeping declarations of equality that salvation in Yeshua has inaugurated, previously including both Jews and Greeks, slaves and free—equality between males and females as seen in Eden was only to be expected. Galatians 3:28 represents the norm, *the* ideal, of Biblical equality.

Many Christians and Messianics do not think that women should be allowed to teach or occupy any positions of leadership in the *ekklēsia*, based on verses like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12. An hermeneutical question regarding Paul is asked from Galatians 3:28, concerning whether these negative or prohibitive remarks seen later take priority. Because of the wide sweeping effects of the new status Paul describes regarding ethnicity, servitude, and gender, it is best for us to understand Galatians 3:28 to *have higher priority* than these other remarks that Paul makes. Bruce concurs, “Paul states the basic principle here; if restrictions are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus...they are to be understood in relation to Gal. 3:28, and not *vice versa*.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, it needs to be evaluated whether there are some local and not universal circumstances present in these two other statements, as well as if some translation or textual issues are to be considered.<sup>31</sup> Concepts such as “male headship” also need to be questioned, per the debate in contemporary Biblical Studies over whether or not *kephalē* (κεφαλῆ) pertains to “authority” or “source/origin” in Ephesians 5:23, and how it relates to Paul’s word, “husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies” (Ephesians 5:28).<sup>32</sup>

The Apostolic Scriptures are clear that women played an important role in the leadership of the First Century *ekklēsia* along with men. Following Paul’s visit to Philippi in Acts 16, it is the female Lydia who leads the new group of Believers, and Paul’s letter to the Philippians includes a reference to two women, Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2), who presumably occupy positions of leadership. Paul extends greetings to a female apostle, “Junia,” in Romans 16:7 (NRSV, ESV, HCSB).<sup>33</sup> And, we cannot forget the wife-husband teaching duo of Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18. If there are witnesses in the Pauline corpus and Book of Acts to women being in positions of leadership in the local assemblies, then passages that seem to restrict such service, must be viewed as local situations where Paul recommended that the reigns be temporarily pulled back, as there were likely some abuses of gender equality. The observation of Scot McKnight should be well taken:

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<sup>28</sup> John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 100.

<sup>29</sup> For a general overview, consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website, “Women in Ministry.”

<sup>30</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, 190.

<sup>31</sup> For a further analysis of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and related issues, consult the author’s article “The Message of the Pastoral Epistles” and his commentary *The Pastoral Epistles for the Practical Messianic*.

As it concerns the issue of women not being permitted to speak in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, it is noteworthy that earlier in 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul recognized the role that women played in praying and prophesying in public. These two verses later would seem to contradict this. It might be suggested that female “chatter” (Grk. verb *laleō*, λαλέω) in Corinth could be the issue instead, but the authority of the Torah is notably appealed to justify a silence of women.

Various conservative, evangelical Christian interpreters have made a strong case in favor of 1 Corinthians 13:34-35 actually being an interpolation of a later copyist. Of significant interest would be the direct appeal made to “the Law” in silencing women, especially as there is **no specific prohibition** in the Torah or Pentateuch that bars women from speaking in the assembly. This is a position that the author is inclined to seriously consider.

Cf. Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp 699-708; “1 Corinthians 14:34-35: Did Paul Forbid Women to Speak in Church?”, in Payne, pp 217-267.

<sup>32</sup> Consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website, “Male Headship.”

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion on this, consult the author’s blog post, “Jumpin’ Junia(s)!”

"I believe that, as is the case with slavery, so with women, Paul provides an agenda that would take years for the church and society to implement properly and honorably before God."<sup>34</sup>

I myself have struggled in the past, as a Messianic Believer, with the two positions presently advocated in evangelicalism: complementarianism and egalitarianism.<sup>35</sup> (The term "egalitarian" is simply derived from the French *égal*, meaning "equal.") For a season in my Messianic experience, I was of the complementarian position, believing that women were sort-of "equal" to me, but that there were positions that God only intended for men. Today, I still believe that there are positions only intended for men: **Men have to learn to be sexually chaste, and women are to be greatly honored and respected by them.** As far as women being in positions of leadership or teaching within the Body of Messiah, I am now definitely a card-carrying egalitarian.

Today's Messianic community often fails to recognize the gender equality that Yeshua has restored, and which Paul speaks about in Galatians 3:28. As I have observed in an earlier article, "How Are We to Live as Modern Messianics?" (2008), "in some cases the Messianic movement is an institution run by men *for men.*" This shows no immediate signs of disappearing. Some claim that God's Torah gives husbands a Biblical right to completely run their homes, and as such totally disregard the counsel of their wives. Yet, Genesis 1-3, and the ideal as modeled in early Creation, is often not a section of the Torah consulted by such men. Why would it be? Adam and Eve were equals before the Fall—and God forbid we ever return, or even try to return as some believe, to the way that He originally created us!

Consider what it would mean for the so-called "power" of Messianic men, if women were to be regarded as their equals. If there is *true oneness* being experienced in a marriage, with husband and wife as equal partners, then certain husband-specific powers seen in the Torah should no doubt now be shared with the wife (i.e., Numbers 30:3-8), with Yeshua's sacrifice bringing us one step closer to the mutual state of responsibility Adam and Eve experienced in Eden. While a husband, for example, possesses the ability to cancel the foolish words of his wife and daughters (i.e., Numbers 30:10-14)—should not wives be allowed to challenge the foolish words of their husbands and sons?<sup>36</sup>

The blatant disrespect for women that we often see in some distinct parts of the Messianic community, has been a factor in causing me to be most open with my egalitarian convictions. Certainly while I have seen abuses of controlling women because of feminism, there are significant abuses of controlling men as well. An egalitarian position of equality for the sexes is *not* a discussion over whether specific Woman X is qualified for spiritual leadership, because gender should not be the determining factor whether specific Man Y is qualified for spiritual leadership. **Qualifications for spiritual leadership should be determined on the basis of the spiritual temperament, skills, maturity, and the calling one possesses.** Egalitarians argue in principle that both men and women can lead and teach God's people. There are both men and women who are qualified to lead and teach others, and men and women who are not.

I consider it sad sometimes to report that women have been the most encouraging to me throughout my Messianic spiritual life and ministry, as I have been editor of Messianic Apologetics and pursued graduate studies. With a small exception of Messianic men that I can put on one hand, most of the men who have encouraged me spiritually in this time and have helped me grow as a Believer have been evangelical Christians. In fact, some of the most inspirational men to me, in my spiritual pursuits, are those who are already deceased, and whom I only know through their writings or through stories told to me.

Why do I feel so strongly about being a Messianic egalitarian, one who actually *agrees* with Paul that males and females are equal in Messiah Yeshua? **It is because recognizing equality of the sexes hinges on the much larger unity that is to occur among God's people.** Keep in mind that of the Ten Commandments, the Fifth Commandment says "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16), *and* this is

<sup>34</sup> Scot McKnight, *NIV Application Commentary: Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 202.

<sup>35</sup> For a broad Christian overview of this issue, consult James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg, eds., *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> For some additional thoughts, consult Mark Huey's commentary on *Mattot* (Numbers 30:2[1]-32:42), "Vows, Unity, Brotherly Love," appearing in *TorahScope, Volume 1*.

the one commandment that convicted me in 1995 to repent of my sins and call out to the Lord for salvation.<sup>37</sup> This commandment actually has a higher priority than the commandment against murder!<sup>38</sup> The reason this is the case is because respect and stability begin in the home. A young person is to have a godly father and a godly mother who can raise the child properly in the principles of Scripture. A sound family life, where both fathers and mothers share equal responsibility in raising their children, will lead to a cohesive and industrious society. Hertz validly states, “The home is infinitely more important to a people than the schools, the professions or its political life; and filial respect is the ground of national permanence and prosperity.”<sup>39</sup>

## CANCELING DISTINCTIONS? MUTUAL SUBMISSION

What have various contemporary Christian examiners said about the implications of Galatians 3:28? It is important that we consider a selection of opinions, in order to gauge some of our Messianic strengths and weaknesses. Among Galatians commentators, and those who approach the issue of Biblical equality, there are different approaches witnessed to the groups mentioned in Galatians 3:28. Still, one finds some commonality in recognizing that distinctions among God’s people do not matter in light of the bigger issues of faith in the Messiah, what He has accomplished for us, and service to one another. While it is commonly claimed by some that there are Christian examiners who use Galatians 3:28 to cancel or erase all distinctions among people, this is really not the case. Instead, what is really the case is how pointing out what a group’s or a person’s differences are, is not to be the basis of unity and camaraderie for Messiah followers:

- John R.W. Stott: “When we say that Christ has abolished these distinctions, we mean not that they do not exist, but that they do not matter. They are still there, but they no longer create any barriers to fellowship. We recognize each other as equals, brothers and sisters in Christ. By the grace of God we would resist the temptation to despise one another or patronize one another.”<sup>40</sup>
- James D.G. Dunn: “As distinctions, marking racial, social and gender differentiation, which were thought to indicate or imply relative worth or value or privileged status before God, they no longer have that significance...It is highly unlikely that [Paul] would have allowed gender or social status as such, any more than race, to constitute a barrier against any service of the gospel.”<sup>41</sup>
- G. Walter Hansen: “All the divisions and prejudices that matter so much in the world are abolished in Christ.”<sup>42</sup>
- Ben Witherington III: “[I]t is also well to be aware here that Paul is not suggesting here the obliteration of the distinctions he mentions in this verse, but rather their redemption and transformation in Christ. The new creation is the old one transformed and transfigured. These ethnic, social, and sexual distinctions continue to exist but in Christ they are not to determine one’s soteriological or spiritual or social standing in the body of Christ.”<sup>43</sup>
- Philip B. Payne: “The classic statement repudiating ethno-religious, socioeconomic, and gender discrimination in the church is Gal 3:28...Ethno-religious background (Jew/Greek), socioeconomic status (slave/free), and gender (male/female) have no bearing on one’s standing in Christ and in his body, the church. This verse states an accomplished fact; in Christ, believers *are* one, as Jesus prayed in John 17:21 that they would be, with the result that the world would believe. Galatians 3:28 has been called the

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<sup>37</sup> Consult the author’s article “The Assurance of Our Salvation.”

<sup>38</sup> Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17.

<sup>39</sup> Hertz, *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, 299.

<sup>40</sup> Stott, *Galatians*, pp 100-101.

<sup>41</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Black’s New Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 207.

<sup>42</sup> Hansen, 112.

<sup>43</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp 280-281.

'Magna Carta of Humanity' since it affirms equality in Christ that transcends each of the three major social barriers to privilege."<sup>44</sup>

Distinctions among people exist, but when one is in Messiah, using such human distinctions as a matter of privilege or as something to boast about, is prohibitable. Paul told the Philippians how,

"I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Messiah, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Messiah [or, *the* faithfulness of Messiah]<sup>45</sup>, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:8-9).

If Paul can acknowledge how his own personal Jewish pedigree and accomplishments (Philippians 3:4-7) were largely meaningless compared to what Yeshua has done, then the accomplishments of the Greek and Roman Philippians or any others were worth even less than "rubbish" compared to Paul's.

Galatians 3:28 definitely serves as a leveling of the scale, as the Apostle directs his audience to understand *pantes gar humeis heis este en Christō Iēsou* (πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), "**for in union with the Messiah Yeshua, you are all one**" (CJB). Their commonality as brothers and sisters in the Lord is found in what He has done for them, and how they have all been immersed in water as a recognition of His death, burial, and resurrection (cf. Romans 6:3-4). As Paul has said immediately prior to this, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (3:26-27, TNIV). Elsewhere he says, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13), and how in the Lord "there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Messiah is all, and in all" (Colossians 2:11).

It is often argued by Christian complementarians that an egalitarian ideology, present in the Body of Messiah, causes some kind of "sameness" to manifest, and that the natural diversity that is to exist among Believers is erased. In response to the Galatians 3:28 assertion that "**there is neither male nor female,**" D.A. Carson sarcastically asks, "does the Bible mean that male and female are alike in every respect? Who is going to bear the babies? Or do I now get my turn?"<sup>46</sup> Of course, Christian egalitarians recognize that from an anatomical perspective, men cannot give birth to children. There are Biblical instructions that are gender specific, determined by reproductive anatomy that people cannot change. There are times when male-specific and female-specific ministry and counseling, especially during the tenuous years of puberty and adolescence, is absolutely necessary. And, to argue that evangelical Christian egalitarians would support homosexuality or gay marriage is just outright fearmongering and a misrepresentation of data.<sup>47</sup>

The main issue that Christian complementarians have is that Christian egalitarians allow females to occupy positions of leadership in the *ekklēsia* the same as any male. Christian complementarians are largely opposed to ordained female clergy, even with the presence of female leaders in the First Century Body of Messiah detectable. More extreme Christian complementarians think that the presence of female pastors and teachers will negate the importance of male pastors and teachers.

Christian egalitarianism certainly advocates that all in the Body of Messiah are equals, and is widely known for advocating **mutual submission** of one to another. This entails how God's people are to contribute all of their gifts, talents, and skills for the betterment and service of all in the faith community. Philippians 2:3-4 directs us, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Mutual submission involves putting others first, ahead of yourself. Ephesians 5:21 further states, "be subject to one another in the fear of Messiah." The instruction that follows in Ephesians 5:22-33,

<sup>44</sup> Payne, 79.

<sup>45</sup> Grk. *dia pisteōs Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ).

<sup>46</sup> D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 92.

<sup>47</sup> The Statement of Faith of the egalitarian organization Christians for Biblical Equality <<http://cbeinternational.org>> is clear to emphasize: "We believe in the family, celibate singleness, and faithful **heterosexual marriage** as God's design."

principally about husbands and wives, involves a submission of not only the wife to her husband, *but also* the husband to the wife: “each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33). Mutual submission of one to another is required “because we are [all] members of His body” (Ephesians 5:30).

If a marriage relationship has properly manifested reciprocal service and love of wife to the husband *and* husband to the wife, then such service should be manifested among larger ethnic and socio-economic groups within the *ekklēsia*. Distinctions are not to be a cause of division or pride, but the distinctions that Believers have are to be transformed by the power of the gospel as a means to aid the Body of Messiah *for gospel service*. Such distinctions should not be unnecessarily placed as an impediment to being used within the assembly. Philip B. Payne further summarizes,

“[T]he irrelevance of social distinctions listed in Gal 3:28 for standing in Christ does not mean that the church should simply ignore these distinctions. The body of Christ does not exist solely for believers. It interacts with the world as salt and light. In the world and in the church, biological, racial, social, economic, and ethnic differences have not ceased to exist, but form fundamental structures within which humans relate to each other. Standards of decency must be upheld and stumbling blocks avoided (1 Cor 8:9-13; cf. 11:2-16). Acknowledgement of these realities, however, must not become an excuse to deny any group privileges or status in the church or to exclude any group from church office based on ethno-religious background (Jew/Greek), socioeconomic factors (slave/free), or gender (male/female).”<sup>48</sup>

What happens in a religious culture that emphasizes distinctions first, rather than common faith and belief in the Lord Yeshua? What will commonly be manifest in such an environment are **rivalry, suspicion, self-superiority, factionalism, and division**, to be then followed by **resentment and bitterness**. One’s presumed closeness to God will be based on ethnic, socio-economic, and gender differences. Yet, the Holy Scriptures are clear that closeness to God is dependent upon a person’s spiritual maturity and commitment to draw near(er) to Him. Psalm 40:26 should remind us, “Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let those who love Your salvation say continually, ‘The LORD be magnified!’” Access to God is freely available to all people.

The definite advantage of a **mutual submission** ideology, as promoted by evangelical Christian egalitarians, is one where the backgrounds of all Believers are valued, and where contribution to the vitality of the assembly and the mission of God is encouraged—not one group lording a superior status over another. A mutual submission ideology is to encourage love and acts of mercy of brothers and sisters toward one another, which is to then be manifested toward one’s fellow human beings who currently do not know the Messiah Yeshua as Savior. Mutual submission requires us to put ourselves in the place of another, as opposed to individuals making themselves the so-called center of the universe.

An egalitarian ideology of mutual submission, naturally wants to encourage the Body of Messiah to be a place where all Believers can achieve their full potential by the power of the Lord, for the Lord and His Kingdom. Obviously, not all people can be pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets, etc. (cf. Ephesians 4:11-13), but no one should think that his or her ethnicity, economic status, or gender is an impediment for serving in any office. And to this, being a recognized leader in the assembly does require a high level of not only spiritual maturity, but also training and education. Regardless of whether someone serves the Body of Messiah by simply helping others via material needs and good works, praying for their fellow Believers and the world, or is called to do theological research—everyone needs to work together and show mutual honor and respect.

People achieve great things when they function within an environment that looks favorably on great things being accomplished. How many times have I ever heard a Messianic leader or teacher say things like, “**Be all that you can be in Yeshua**”? Not very much. In fact, in the time that our family has been Messianic since 1995, I would dare say that I have heard it implied more times that such an idea of achieving great things might be “a prideful error” of Christianity, or even Hellenism, that needs to be thrown out. *I sincerely hope that I have just been hearing the wrong voices on this one!*

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<sup>48</sup> Payne, 85.

## WHY IS THERE LITTLE UNITY IN THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT TODAY?

When we take a good look at some of the Messianic leaders and teachers “out there,” who are the proverbial movers and shakers in our faith community — are they more likely to emphasize distinctions among people *or* common faith in Yeshua as being the most important? It is safe to say that a majority of the well known leaders of the broad Messianic movement—be they found in Messianic Judaism, the One Law/One Torah sub-movement, the Two-House sub-movement, or something else—hold to a complementarian viewpoint of Galatians 3:28. They believe that all in the Messiah are to be regarded as “equal,” but to various degrees they also advocate that distinctions among people are to be maintained. In more than a few cases, distinctions among people are to be *rigidly maintained*.

The issue of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers being equal in Yeshua is something that is going to be a struggle until He returns. To many in contemporary Messianic Judaism, differences and distinctions between Jewish people and others need to be *readily pointed out*. Rather than seeing mixed congregations of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers fellowshipping in one accord, and demonstrating the great reconciliation available in the Messiah—at many Messianic congregations non-Jewish Believers are asked to leave, or they are at least told that such a place is really not for them. Even in Messianic congregations where Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are all welcome—which to be fair does make up a large part of our faith community—the leadership tends to be widely negative about women occupying positions of ministry and leadership. Just about every Messianic congregation I have visited is guilty at one time or another, of making differences and distinctions *the most important thing*, and not common faith in the Messiah of Israel. Of course, there are those I have encountered who, because of the course of time, have generously repented of previous mistakes.

Those such as myself, who advocate an egalitarian, mutually submissive ideology, are not so infrequently branded with negative monikers like “feminist” and “liberal” by some Messianic persons. However, an ideology of mutual submission where all Believers work together, and are viable contributing members of the *ekklesia*, **could definitely stop some of the fellowship problems** witnessed in much of today’s Messianic community. Neither Jewish or non-Jewish Believers, nor men and women, lose their distinctiveness in a mutually submissive environment. What they do lose in a mutually submissive environment is their ethnic or personal distinctiveness being the most important thing *to God*. Who we are as mortals is to be secondary to who the Eternal is, and what Yeshua has accomplished for sinful humanity.<sup>49</sup> And so, it might be said that in view of the Lord, one’s personal distinctions do get decisively blurred a bit.

People who are mutually submissive to one another, and believe in a spiritual culture where all of the gifts, talents, and skills of God’s people can be used—will achieve great things for the Kingdom. The Messianic community has great potential, as we witness Jewish people come to faith in Messiah Yeshua, and evangelical Christian Believers embrace their Hebraic Roots—to employ the strong suits and virtues of both the Jewish Synagogue and Christian Church to accomplish great things. As always, though, human prejudice, pride, and insecurity stand in too much of our way. We have not fully been able to understand the significance of what Paul says in Romans 12:4-5, 9-10:

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Messiah, and individually we are members one of another...Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor” (NRSV).

Indeed, because of the deeply rooted complementarianism present in much of the Messianic movement, which seeks more to divide Believers based on their differences—rather than bring them together based on their trust in Yeshua—there is unnecessary rivalry and contention. When those desiring unity affirm that Yeshua is to have one flock of sheep (John 10:14-18), it can then be retorted back with a terse statement that

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<sup>49</sup> Consult the author’s article “The Faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah.”

His sheep are to be divided out into separate pens.<sup>50</sup> When trying to find a solution to negative provocations with a word like Hebrews 10:24, “let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,” *I have actually been dismissed* as the one with the problem. **Until the broad Messianic movement is decisively broken of its widespread culture of division** (i.e., differences and distinctions among God’s people emphasized first), **I fear that we will be corporately stifled and limited from accomplishing our full spiritual potential.**

I have heard stories of many Messianic non-Jewish men going to the leaders of Messianic Jewish congregations and demand that they be treated as equals and not as second-class citizens or attendees. *Some of them have actually screamed Galatians 3:28 at Messianic Jewish leaders.* But the Messianic Jewish leaders will not really listen. Why is this the case? Do they deny Paul’s words of Jewish and non-Jewish equality? Or, is God Himself prohibiting such Messianic non-Jewish men from having their prayers answered? Quite frequently, such Messianic non-Jewish men only really believe in the first third of Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek,” but they do not really believe in the final third of Galatians 3:28, “there is neither male nor female.” The LORD God of Israel is not going to honor the request of a Messianic non-Jewish man, to be treated as a welcomed equal in Messianic Judaism, if such a man’s wife might not be treated as an equal, co-leader of the family along with him.

Surely when these men cry “foul” at Messianic Jewish leaders about why they are not treated as equal – but then fail to treat their own wives as their equal partners in marriage (Ephesians 5:21) – there is something that we might be missing. We hear a great deal about “the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21) in various parts of our faith community, but we do not hear a great deal about being restored to the condition that Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden of Eden. **Why?** That is a part of the Torah too.

I have a feeling that the message of Biblical equality that Paul writes about in Galatians 3:28 is something that much of today’s Messianic movement is not ready to really handle. I doubt that many of this current generation of Messianics are ready to return to the Edenic ideals that constitute “the restoration of all things.” One of the significant reasons we do not have unity among us today is because the *ethnic equality* that is prioritized by “There is neither Jew nor Greek,” has not been initiated by the *familial equality* that begins in the home with “there is neither male nor female.” If husbands do not treat their wives as their equal partners, or if sons are not raised to respect their mothers and sisters – why on Earth would we expect to see a greater unity manifested among God’s corporate people? The Kingdom of God is supposed to be made up of redeemed individuals. The respect we show our close kin is to be manifested on a greater plane by respecting those of other cultures and societies, and diverse socio-economic backgrounds, making sure that everyone feels welcomed and useful within the Body of Messiah. **All I can say is that we seem to have a long way to go.**

As Messianic husbands and wives learn to work together as co-leaders of the family, such a mutual submission will then naturally manifest itself in the much larger faith community. It has commonly been said that if the home is in proper order, then so will one’s local congregation or assembly.

In today’s Messianic movement there are fierce debates over the place of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, and to what degree they are “equal.” Consider how important *it really is* for husbands and wives to lead the home together, and how mutual submission of the spouses reflects the need for mutual submission of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the Body of Messiah – as all work together to accomplish the mission of God. It might be heard that male-female equality is only a red herring or a kind of side issue to the much larger discussion of Jews and non-Jews in a Messianic environment working together, **but the fact is that they are directly interconnected.** The foundation of a stable faith community is found in the home, and in the relationships present in the family. If husbands and wives know how to lead the family together and can work together in harmony, then having mixed congregations of Jewish Believers and Believers from the nations should not be so difficult or impossible to really see come forth.

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<sup>50</sup> Of course, the type of unity that all Messiah followers are to have, is to actually go as far as the type of unity that the Father and Son have as members of the Godhead (John 17:21-23). This is something that is humanly impossible for any of us to achieve, but such excellence does need to be desired.

For a further discussion, consult the article “Unity, Despite Diversity in the Body of Messiah” by Mark Huey, appearing in the December 2010 issue of Outreach Israel News.



Our ministry (Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics) may stand alone for a while in its egalitarian convictions, when compared to other Messianic groups, but an egalitarian viewpoint of gender roles *and* Jewish-non-Jewish relations within the Body of Messiah is imperative for the long term viability and mission of the Messianic movement.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> For a further evaluation of related issues, consult the article "The Significance of the Messiah Event" by Margaret McKee Huey and J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper* (forthcoming).