

Galatians 3:28

Biblical Equality and Today's Messianic Movement

by J.K. McKee posted 01 July, 2008 www.tnnonline.net

GALATIANS 3:28 – MULTIPLE VERSIONS

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).

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).

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (NIV).

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).

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).

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).

GALATIANS 3:28 – GREEK

ouk eni Ioudaios oude Hellēn, ouk eni doulos oude eleutheros, ouk eni arsen kai thēlu pantes gar humeis heis este en Christō Iēsou.

οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαίος οὐδὲ Ἑλλήν, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

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 status that has been inaugurated via the sacrificial work of Yeshua, now brought to God's people who are to be accomplishing His tasks in the Earth. At times, we do find Galatians 3:28 quoted among those in our faith community, but its ramifications are often not fully considered. Current and severe developments in the Messianic movement as of 2008 require that we take a fresh look at this verse, what its message of equality means for us, and things that we may be missing as we seek to be a people useful for the Lord's work. This single verse asks us many significant questions about both Biblical equality *and* why the Messianic community has little, if any, unity today.¹

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. He unequivocally states in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua." Three categories of people are listed in this verse:

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

¹ Sections of this article have been adapted and significantly expanded from the editor's commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*, second edition (Kissimmee, FL: TNN Press, 2007).

These various conditions have absolutely no bearing when it comes to being “one” in the Lord. **Unity in Yeshua goes beyond all ethnic, social, and gender barriers.**

Galatians 3:28 carries some profound significance for us today that all sectors of the worldwide Body of Messiah struggle with. Paul's argument is not that the natural ethnic, social or employment, and gender barriers necessarily go away—but instead that a strong degree of unity should prevail considering that *all* are 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 “radical” kind of 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).² Paul's attitude runs completely contrary to this when he tells the Corinthians, a mixed group of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, “our fathers³ were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1). The Patriarchs of Israel are considered the “fathers” of the non-Jewish Believers every bit as much as the Jewish Believers. Whether they 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 earth⁴” (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*, 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 *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].⁵

While the men are to declare the third stanza, the women are to instead declare, “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe who hast made me according to thy will⁶.”⁷ Paul counters all three categories, saying that to a significant degree that they are *now obsolete* in the

² Margaret Wenig Rubenstein and David Weiner, trans., in Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 167.

³ Grk. *hoi pateres hēmōn pantes* (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν πάντες).

⁴ Heb. *b'kol ha'eret* (בְּכָל־הָאֶרֶץ).

⁵ 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.

^{t.} *Berachot* 6:18.

⁶ Heb. *she'ashani k'retzunu* (שֶׁעָשָׂנִי כְרִצּוֹנִי).

⁷ Hertz, 21.

Lord. A Jewish person reading the Epistle to the Galatians should have had a very good idea about the kind of equality and unity he was advocating. Yet, 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...⁸

Noting these distinctions, F.F. Bruce concludes, “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.”⁹ Lest we think Paul is railing against his own Jewish heritage, his remarks also affected some Hellenistic views of distinctions among people as well. Paul desired a great unity among all human beings—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 that is to now be fully realized that Messiah Yeshua and His salvation have come!

“Neither Jew Nor Greek”

The first of the categories Paul lists in Galatians 3:28, is *ouk eni Ioudaios oude Hellēn* (οὐκ ἐνι Ἰουδαίῳ 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**. In his epistles, the Apostle Paul is absolutely magnanimous about the great honor that God has bestowed upon the Jewish people, saying in Romans 3:1-2, “what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect.”¹⁰ 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 that would have been familiar with his diverse audiences (albeit infused with Hebraic concepts from the Tanach).¹¹

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, “God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30), 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 Cilician Aratus, who said “For we also are His children” (Acts 17:28).¹²

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

⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, Vol. 41 (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1990), 157.

⁹ F.F. Bruce, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 187.

¹⁰ Grk. *polu kata panta tropon* (πολὺ κατὰ πάντα τρόπον), “Considerable in every way” (HCSB).

¹¹ 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* 9b).

Cf. Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer: Paul's Background and Torah Perspective* (Littleton, CO: First Fruits of Zion, 2002), 40.

¹² Kenneth L. Barker, ed., et. al., *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1721.

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 can see value not only in his own Jewish heritage, but also in some of the thoughts 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 of us 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.¹³ 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.

The first part of Galatians 3:28 is difficult for many of today's Messianic Jews to accept. While officially, the Messianic Jewish movement is to be a move whereby the Jewish elements of Yeshua's life can be recaptured, and Jews can still be Jews even if they believe in Jesus, too much of the Messianic Jewish movement has erected barriers between itself and non-Jewish Believers who want to know more about their Hebraic Roots. The idea of “It's only for us” is seen at many Messianic Jewish congregations where the equality of which Paul speaks is not emphasized. While officially, unity among all is emphasized, unofficially in practice two tiers of Believers exist. Jewish Believers are (unconsciously) believed to be “closer to God” than non-Jewish Believers. Because of the difficulty for many Messianic Jews to fully accept the thrust of Paul's words—welcoming *all* into their midst—it leads some non-Jews in the Messianic movement to fall into the error of the Galatians. These people seek conversion to Judaism (“circumcision”)¹⁴ for inclusion and full acceptance, *when they should have had it via the enriched faith* presented to them at the Messianic congregation.

It is commonly argued by theologians that the Torah was given by God only for an ethnic “nation,” Israel. Yet the Lord is clear to say at the outset of the Exodus, “The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you” (Exodus 12:49). Later the Lord will tell Israel at Mount Sinai, “if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine¹⁵” (Exodus 19:5), as Israel's obedience to God's Torah involved its mission in God wanting all nations to come to Himself. Israel's obedience to God's commandments was to embody in its people the very character of God, and make a difference in the world in which it found itself. This is not contrary to the worldview of Paul, and his missionary activity among the nations. In fact, Paul firmly lives up to this in his ministry work, appropriating Exodus 19:5 in his words to Titus: “[Yeshua] gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14).

¹³ Consult the editor's further remarks in the excursus “Should Non-Jewish Messianic Believers ‘Convert’ to (Messianic) Judaism?” seen in *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

¹⁴ Throughout Galatians, I largely take “circumcision” (Grk. *peritomē*, περιτομή) to not be a reference to a medical procedure, as much as it is a reference to the ritual of a proselyte converting to Judaism. T.R. Schreiner indicates, “in the intertestamental period circumcision was typically required for one to become a proselyte to Judaism...any diminution of the rite would naturally inflame both the cultural and religious passions of the Jews” (“Circumcision,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 138). Messianic author Tim Hegg concurs that a better understanding of “circumcision” is as “a short-hand way of referring to the ritual of a proselyte, the rabbinic ceremony in which a non-Jew was accorded the status of a Jew” (*A Study of Galatians* [Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2002], 4). This process would have been available for both men and women (cf. Galatians 5:3, Grk.).

¹⁵ Heb. *ki li kol ha'aretz* (כִּי לִי כֹל הָאֶרֶץ).

From Galatians 3:28, there is to be a unity in Messiah's Body among Jewish Believers and non-Jewish Believers, where both Judaism and the diverse cultural backgrounds of everyone are mutually respected, because *we are all a part of God's Creation*. This is a problem that we all need to work through as the Messianic community. We need to emphasize equality among all in our assemblies, regardless of ethnicity. Messianic Jews need to remember that the mission placed upon Israel by God was to be a light to the world. Messianic non-Jews need to make sure that they are pursuing a Messianic lifestyle as part of their sanctification in the Lord, *not* because their own ethnicity is insufficient to be accepted before Him. All are to remember "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18), as God's people—whomever they may be and however diverse they may be—are His inheritance (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:18; Malachi 3:17). And in this we cannot forget, "it is clear that 'Israel as a light to the nations' is no peripheral theme within the canonical process. The nations are the matrix of Israel's life, the *raison d'être* of her very existence" (ABD).¹⁶

"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 against its First Century background, because slavery is not practiced in the West and is today considered to be abhorrent. 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).¹⁷ 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."¹⁸ Furthermore, being a "slave" in the Roman context may have extended some strong privileges to a person, not present among average people. 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."¹⁹

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

¹⁶ Duane L. Christensen, "Nations," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:1037.

¹⁷ Indeed, both the Hebrew *eved* (עֶבֶד) and Greek *doulos* (δούλος) can be rendered as either "slave" or "servant," contingent on context.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ S. Scott Barchy, "Slavery (Greco-Roman)," in ABD, 6:66.

political right to rule over them.”²⁰ The vast majority of “slaves” that we see in Ancient Israel are what we would 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 Hillelite progressive 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,²¹ especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord” (Philemon 15-16).²²

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 “radical” for their day in either the Fifteenth or Thirteenth Century B.C.E. when the Torah was given to Ancient Israel. 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.”

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 tithes.* Yet, 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, “if 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

²⁰ Haas, “Slave, Slavery,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, 780.

²¹ Grk. *hyper doulon, adelphon agarēton* (ὑπὲρ δοῦλον, ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν).

²² Consult the editor’s entry on the Epistle to Philemon in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

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 ἐνὶ 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 role to play in the administration 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).²³ 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 *tzela* (צֵלָע), 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. In the ideal state from the beginning of Creation, both man and woman were to serve one another as equals, relying on one another and 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*:

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!'²⁴

In this mythological account of Creation, we not only see that humanity is birthed by the womb-goddess, but that it is 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

²³ Do note that I am a moderate advocate of 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). Consult the FAQ on the TNN website "Inclusive Language."

²⁴ Stephanie Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp 14-15ff.

out of nothing, as Hebrews 11:3 says 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)—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!”²⁵ 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 periods 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 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.”²⁶

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 have a permanent reminder on their penises via their circumcision, as a sign of God’s everlasting 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.”²⁷ It is up to the man to determine whether the *ot b’rit* (אוֹת 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

²⁵ Ronald B. Allen, “Numbers,” in Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 2:943.

²⁶ J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1960), 491.

²⁷ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), pp 202, 203.

because Queen Esther was in the right place at the right time, as the Jewish people were saved from extermination.²⁸ 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 (Mathew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8). 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. Yet this must be balanced 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” (Nehemiah 8:17)—which was after the Babylonian exile! The Ancient Israelites did not always follow the commands of God, and because of His love and grace He often overlooked their significant transgressions. Severe chastisement to Israel often did not come until idolatry 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 households 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.”

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 overseers/bishops and deacons only be allowed one wife (1 Timothy 3:2, 12). Furthermore, and perhaps most significant, he 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 involved the Lord serving a single body of people, *not* multiple bodies of people: “let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33, RSV).

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

²⁸ Consult the editor's articles “Purim for the Two Houses of Israel” and “The Message of Esther,” appearing in the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*.

cultic leaders and personalities are those who practice it and it leads to great abuse and many scandals.²⁹

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* (עֵצֶם מֵעֲצָמַי וּבָשָׂר מִבְּשָׂרִי), “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” 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.³⁰

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 bear children. Yet, 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. Likewise, 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.

Perhaps most significant to consider is that the new status of equality for males and females allows women to be leaders in the *ekklēsia*—one of the most controversial ideas that evangelical Christianity is currently struggling with, and soon the Messianic movement. 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 today believe that women should not be allowed to teach or occupy any positions of leadership in the *ekklēsia*, based on other statements made by Paul such as 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*.”³¹ They must first be understood against the circumstances to which Paul was writing in Corinth and which Timothy faced in Ephesus, lest they be *local circumstances* rather than universal circumstances.³²

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

²⁹ The practice of polygamy will be explored later this year in an article tentatively titled, “Is Polygamy for Today?” Also planned will be an evaluation of related subjects, in the article “Addressing the Frequently Avoided Issues Messianics Encounter in the Torah.”

³⁰ David H. Stern 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” (*Jewish New Testament Commentary* [Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995], 720).

³¹ Bruce, 190.

³² Consult the editor’s entries on the Epistles of 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

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.³³ Paul extends greetings to a female apostle, "Junia," in Romans 16:7 (NRSV, ESV, HCSB). 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 such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 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.³⁴

I myself have struggled in the past with the two positions presently advocated in evangelicalism: complimentarianism and egalitarianism.³⁵ For a long time, I was of the complimentarian position, believing that women were sort-of "equal" to me, but that there were clearly 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 honored and respected by them.** Today's Messianic community often fails with recognizing the gender equality that Yeshua has restored, and which Paul speaks about in Galatians 3:28. In fact as I said earlier this year, "in some cases the Messianic movement is an institution run by men *for men*."³⁶ This is the case now more than ever! Some claim that God's Torah gives husbands a Biblical right to completely run their households 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!

The blatant disrespect for women that we often see in the Messianic community has pushed me the past few years toward the egalitarian³⁷ position. 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 calling one possesses.** It is an argument 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 TNN Online 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.

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 the one commandment that convicted me

³³ Consult the editor's commentary *Philippians for the Practical Messianic*.

³⁴ Consult the FAQ on the TNN website "Women in Ministry."

³⁵ For a Christian consideration of this issue, consult "The Women in Ministry Debate," in Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), pp 225-235. Also consult James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg, eds., *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

Some theological conversation on the issue has at least been presented in the camp of Messianic Judaism. Consult the section "Senior Congregational Leadership—For Men Only?" in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *Voices of Messianic Judaism* (Baltimore: Lederer Books, 2001), pp 151-168.

³⁶ Consult the editor's article "How Are We to Live as Modern Messianics?"

³⁷ The term "egalitarian" is simply derived from the French *égal*, meaning "equal."

in 1995 to repent of my sins and call out to the Lord for salvation.³⁸ This commandment actually has a higher priority than the commandment against murder!³⁹ The reason this is the case is because respect and stability begin at 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.”⁴⁰

Why is there little unity in the Messianic movement today?

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. *Some of them have actually screamed Galatians 3:28 at Messianic Jewish leaders.* But the Messianic Jewish leaders will not 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? 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 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 *national 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. **All I can say is that we seem to have a long way to go.**

The message of Galatians 3:28 is very difficult for today's Messianic movement. How soon *or* how long it takes for us to implement it will determine how much *or* how little unity we truly desire among ourselves.

J.K. McKee (B.A., University of Oklahoma; M.A., Asbury Theological Seminary) is the editor of TNN Online (www.tnnonline.net) and is a Messianic apologist. He is author of several books, including: *The New Testament Validates Torah*, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*, and *When Will the Messiah Return?* He has also written many articles on the Two Houses of Israel and Biblical theology, and is presently focusing on Messianic commentaries on various books of the Bible.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.

³⁸ Consult the editor's article “The Assurance of Our Salvation.”

³⁹ Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17.

⁴⁰ Hertz, 299.