

WHAT WINGER PRESENTLY GETS WRONG:

EGALITARIAN SILVER BULLET? (GALATIANS 3:28)

15 June 2023

What is the significance of Galatians 3:28 for the question whether church eldership is open to women? Is it a silver bullet for egalitarians? Is it of no real significance? Or is it somewhere in between – not decisive on its own but an important part of the picture?

This article responds to Mike Winger's video 'Women in Ministry Part 7: The Egalitarian "Silver Bullet" Bible Verse'.¹

Click [here](#) for a pdf of the complete article. If you're in a hurry, click [here](#) for a quick summary.

Please do not misunderstand our title 'What Winger Presently Gets Wrong' as implying any personal criticism of Mike. On the contrary, by including his name in the title, we are acknowledging the prominence of the ministry to which the Lord has called him. His Bible teaching is often of good quality and of much benefit to many people. He is a valued brother in Christ. But on this topic of Women in Ministry we are convinced that he has made major mistakes and has misread Scripture.

Of course, Mike tries hard to think clearly and teach biblically. But if you think that Mike consistently succeeds in that aim, our responses may give you reasons to reconsider.

Who are we, and why are we responding to Mike Winger?

Andrew Bartlett is based in the UK. He is the author of [Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts](#) (2019). He has been studying Scripture for nearly 60 years. In his day job as an international arbitrator and judge, he specializes in dispassionate analysis of texts, evidence and arguments. He has a degree in theology and has served in lay leadership in several churches.

Terran Williams is a South African pastor-teacher, with a ministry of planting and nurturing churches. He is the author of [How God Sees Women: The End of Patriarchy](#) (2022) and a number of other books.

'Complementarianism' subordinates women under men's authority in the church and in the home. When Andrew and Terran wrote their books, Andrew was a member of a complementarian church and Terran had just completed his long tenure as a leading pastor of a complementarian church. They each engaged with the leading scholarly complementarian works and independently concluded that God's word does not subordinate women under men.

¹ The video can be found on Mike's own site biblethinker.org and on YouTube.

Mike Winger started releasing his video teachings on ‘Women in Ministry’ soon after Terran’s book was published. Because Mike’s lengthy videos have been watched by many thousands of people, he has emerged as one of the world’s most influential complementarian teachers. On reviewing Mike’s videos, Andrew and Terran found that there were substantial errors in Mike’s research, reasoning, and handling of Scripture.

Since the ordinary believer is more likely to get their information about Scripture from free online resources than from scholarly books, Andrew and Terran decided to team up and write some freely available responses to Mike’s teaching.

We love Mike’s heart. He repeatedly indicates his readiness to change his mind if solid reasons are put to him. He says: ‘If you’re a scholar who’s really studied in this area and you want to give me pushback, I really would like to read it now. If I’m wrong, I want to know it. Love to see that pushback.’ [Part 8 video, 0hr6mins] We commend Mike for his openness, and we thank him for his invitation. **We remain hopeful that he will engage with the feedback that we have been sending to him and publishing since November 2022.**

If you find that we have made some errors of our own, please write and tell us, so that we can make any needed corrections. You can email us at terranwill -at- gmail.com.² Please put these words in the subject-line: Winger Part 7.

You can see our articles on other videos by Mike at <https://terranwilliams.com/articles/>. Or use these links:

- Part 2 (Genesis 1–3) — www.bit.ly/40lo9oh
- Part 3 (OT Women) — www.bit.ly/3jAjCNX
- Part 4 (NT Women) part A — www.bit.ly/3JDVRiB
- Part 4 (NT Women) part B — www.bit.ly/3X08GXx
- Part 5 (Women Apostles) — www.bit.ly/3mMssJV
- Part 8 (Meaning of Head) — www.bit.ly/3RwliET
- Part 9 (“Wives submit”) — www.bit.ly/3l8CmVv
- Part 10 (Head Covering, 1 Cor 11) — www.bit.ly/3JV6kpD
- Part 11 (“Women be silent,” 1 Cor 14) — www.bit.ly/3naLVUL

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Overview

Galatians 3:28 says:

‘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, as used by Mike)³

The basic point that Mike makes in his video is that this verse is not an egalitarian silver bullet which definitively establishes that eldership in the local church is open to women.

We agree with that basic point.

However, his video paints a substantially misleading picture of how egalitarians generally view Galatians 3:28.

We notice that Mike makes a variety of criticisms of egalitarian scholars for missteps that he identifies as

- not sticking with what the passage is actually about and actually says,
- reinterpreting the passage as being about modern concepts which Paul didn't know about and wasn't thinking about.

We agree in principle that such things are missteps.

But Mike repeatedly makes the same missteps in his videos on Women in Ministry, as we discuss in our responses.

For example, he gets things out of Genesis 2 that simply are not there; and, in order to do so, he employs the modern sociological concept of 'roles' for men and women, which the writer of

³ We often refer to or quote the ESV in this article. We do this simply because it was produced by complementarian scholars and is used by Mike. Our use of it does not imply endorsement of it as a version or preference over other versions.

Genesis didn't know about and wasn't thinking about. See our response to his Part 2 video on Genesis <https://terranwilliams.com/what-winger-gets-wrong-with-genesis-1-3/>.

Mike makes that mistake again in his Part 7 video, where he repeatedly refers to gender 'roles'. He's not thinking biblically: he's thinking in modern sociological categories. It appears he's not aware that he's doing it.

Most important of all, Mike misses the true significance of Galatians 3:28 as an important part of the larger picture that makes his complementarian position an implausible interpretation of Scripture.

Misleading picture

At the beginning of his video Mike says that 'many' egalitarians, 'not just a few random people', use Galatians as a silver bullet. In other words, it is used to end the discussion on women's ministry, irrespective of what other texts say (0hr0mins).

How many is 'many'? Mike's notes say 'some', and Mike quotes some egalitarian scholars who do use it that way.

But in his video 'some' or 'many' soon turns into 'all'. He says that 'all' egalitarians try to stretch out Galatians 3:28 to apply to being an elder (0hr33mins).

That is not correct. And Mike knows it is not correct. We guess it was a slip of the tongue.

Here are four examples of expositions of Scripture which conclude that eldership is open to women:

Linda L. Belleville in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (2005)

Craig S. Keener in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (2005)

Andrew Bartlett in *Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts* (2019)

Terran Williams in *How God Sees Women: The End of Patriarchy* (2022).

None of those expositions says that Galatians 3:28 proves that women may be appointed as elders.

There's nothing particularly unusual about that.

Listeners may get the impression from Mike's video that support for women's eldership depends upon a mistaken view of Galatians 3:28. But that is certainly not so.

Introducing the true significance of Galatians 3:28

Some complementarian scholars read Galatians 3:28 merely as a general statement about the basis for membership in the body of Christ and one's status before God. They deny that Paul is

concerned with the practical and communal outworking of this crucial piece of theology. ‘Paul was not reflecting upon relations within the body of Christ.’⁴

But it is rather extraordinary to claim that Paul was not reflecting upon relations within the body of Christ, when in v28 itself he uses the words: ‘for you are all one in Christ Jesus’. How could those words *not* be about relations within the body?

And if Paul is not concerned with the implications of the gospel for relations within the body of Christ, why has he used in chapter 2 the vivid and embarrassing example of Peter and other Jews wrongly withdrawing from eating with Gentile Christians?

We find Mike’s own view of Galatians 3:28 somewhat obscure, but we think he agrees that such a limited understanding is not correct. The complementarian position is not assisted by an unjustified denial that Galatians 3:28 is relevant to relations within the body of Christ.

On the other side of the discussion, as we’ve mentioned, we also agree with Mike that Galatians 3:28, rightly understood, is not an egalitarian silver bullet on the question of women as church elders or pastors.

But – and here we firmly disagree with Mike – Galatians 3:28 is an important part of the larger picture that makes implausible the complementarian position which Mike holds.

Notice that ‘implausible’ is not the same as ‘impossible’. If Scripture taught explicitly somewhere that women could not be church elders, our duty would be to accept it and obey it, even if it seemed somewhat out of step with Galatians 3:28 and even if no reason or explanation were given. But Scripture does not explicitly teach anywhere that women cannot be elders. (We will come back to that at the end.)

Much of Mike’s video engages with Cynthia Westfall’s discussion of Galatians 3:28 in her book *Paul and Gender*. Her discussion is complex and nuanced and we have decided to concentrate on the Scripture passage rather than on Mike’s critique of her discussion.

To see why Galatians 3:28 is an important part of the larger picture that makes the complementarian position implausible, we first need to understand its context.

The context in Paul’s letter

Let’s go back to the situation that Paul is addressing in his letter. We’ll set out the context in some detail, and as we go on you’ll see why.

Let’s go sit among the Galatians to hear what Paul is saying. Let’s imagine we are there, when Paul’s letter has just arrived. Imagine we’re about to listen to it being read out:

⁴ Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (1981), 126-127.

We're remembering that Paul and Barnabas came to our town only a little while ago, announcing the good news of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah or Christ, the unique Son of God, the true Lord.

They told us that this Jesus, when he died on a cross, was giving himself to take away sin, which is rebellion against God.

They said this Jesus was raised from the dead to start a new humanity and a new creation.

And that this Jesus poured out on his followers the gift of the Holy Spirit, his own presence and power, to begin that new creation as a living reality in their lives.

Most of us were not Jews but Gentiles, and all of this was very new to us. But we were convinced. We believed their message. We turned to Jesus and put our trust in him.

We were baptized in water to pledge our allegiance to him as Lord.⁵ We received forgiveness of our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the Spirit of God's Son. And we saw God our Father work amazing miracles among us.⁶

Soon after Paul and Barnabas had left, some more teachers arrived. Like Paul and Barnabas, the new teachers were Jews who followed Jesus the Messiah.

But they said they were from Jerusalem, and the message we had received was incomplete. They said if we wanted to inherit God's promised blessing, we had to live as Jews.⁷

That meant, we should keep the Jewish law, the law of Moses, with all its regulations about food and ritual purity, and keeping the Jewish calendar with all its special days and seasons and festivals. And they said that all of us who were male had to be circumcised, as the Jewish law requires.

That all sounded rather daunting – what a load to carry!

But to many of us, it seemed to make very good sense. After all, as they said, wasn't Jesus himself a Jew? Wasn't he descended from the forefather of the Jewish nation, the great patriarch Abraham? Weren't God's ancient promises given to Abraham? And after giving the promises, hadn't God given the ritual of circumcision and the law of Moses to mark out the Jews as his own special people and show them how to live?

So, if we want to follow Jesus and inherit God's promised blessing, it seems we have to become Jews and follow the Jewish law! We've already started observing the special days.

So, let's hear what Paul thinks about it. What's his letter going to say?

'I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one ...' (1:6-7)

⁵ Compare 1 Pet 3:21. This is why baptism was later called a 'sacrament'. The *sacramentum* was the soldier's oath of allegiance upon joining the military.

⁶ Galatians 3:5.

⁷ Compare 2:14.

‘O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?’ (3:1)

Oh, wow! What have we got into?!

Now let’s look in more detail at Paul’s response in Chapter 3.

‘... It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?’ (3:1-3)

Paul is appealing to the message the Galatians heard when he preached Christ to them, and he’s appealing to what they experienced: they received the Spirit when they responded to the message by putting their trust in Christ crucified.

But he needs to deal head on with what is being taught by the new teachers, the Judaizers, so in v5-9 he goes on to appeal to the Jewish Scriptures, to the story of Abraham in the book of Genesis.

The pivotal event of Abraham’s life was when God called him and gave him a promise that he would bless all nations through his family line; and Abraham responded in faith, in trust. Scripture says that was credited to him as righteousness. That means Abraham came into right relationship to God, he received God’s acceptance, he was counted as on God’s side, no longer a rebel.

And, Paul says in v8, the Scripture foresaw that this was how the promised blessing would be received by the nations, the Gentiles, through faith.

Next, Paul goes on to remind the Galatians that in the gospel, the good news, this faith is faith in Christ crucified. See in particular v13-14. At the Cross, Jesus exhausted the curse of the law. He is the Redeemer who fulfils God’s ancient promise of blessing, the blessing that is received by faith in him. And so, both Jews and Gentiles receive the promised Spirit, the Spirit of God’s Son in their hearts.

In the next part of the chapter, Paul anticipates and answers an objection, which he spells out in v19:

‘Why then the law?’

If the fulfilment of the promised blessing is simply through the work of Christ, and is received by those who put their faith in Christ, then what was the point of the law of Moses – what was it for?

We don’t need to go into all the details of Paul’s answer to that question. His basic point is that the law had a temporary restraining function, which has ended:

‘... the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.’ (3:24)

In Paul's Greek, the 'guardian' that he is referring to here is the household slave whose job was to oversee the male children of the household, to keep them out of trouble and on track, until they reached maturity. From the very nature of that supervisory function, it was time-limited. It came to an end when the children grew up.

Paul's point is: because of Christ's coming, the Jewish law had fulfilled its function. Now, there was only one essential feature of the people of God: faith in Christ.

Faith, of course, is not just believing in our heads that Christ is real and alive. Faith is a new orientation of our lives – it means putting our trust in him, giving him our allegiance as our Lord.

Verses 26-29

Now, on to the critical passage, vv26-29:

... [26] for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. [27] For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. [28] 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. [29] And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Having surveyed the context, we are able to learn something here about three important topics: identity, worth and purpose.

Identity

Having responded to the Christian message, the good news of Christ, what is the Galatians identity – who are they now?

Paul teaches that they have received a new identity. Because they have become identified with Christ, the unique Son of God, through faith, they themselves have all become 'sons of God'.

What about that expression 'have put on Christ' – how are we to understand that?

We try to read who people are from what they put on – their clothes.

In the ancient world, even more than today, your clothes declared your identity. As the Galatians sat there, listening to the letter, their clothes declared their gender, their age, their ethnicity, whether they were slave or free, and their status in society.

Galatia was a Greek area which was a province of the Roman empire. A Roman boy wore a striped tunic, but when he became an adult he wore a plain white one. But a Roman of high rank wore a toga with a purple border. Women's clothing differed from men's. Slaves wore rough garments. And so on.

Paul says in v27:

‘as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.’

So, everyone who has pledged allegiance to Christ in baptism has received new clothes to wear: a new identity, and that identity is Christ himself, the Son of God.

As Paul says in v26:

‘You are all sons of God, through faith.’

If the Galatians understand that, then they should reject the teaching of the Judaizers. If the Galatians understand that they have a new identity in Christ, a new identity as ‘sons of God’ through faith, how could there possibly be any need for Gentiles to become Jews?

Worth

In v28-29 Paul goes on to explain this new identity in a way that goes beyond the presenting issue of Jew versus Gentile and draws out its fuller implications.

Seen against the context which we have looked at, Paul’s words here are very striking.

If all that Paul wanted to do was to emphasize that the true gospel breaks down the division between Jew and *Gentile*, because both come to God through faith in Christ, why does he write ‘There is neither Jew nor *Greek*’?

Given the context, why doesn’t Paul simply write in v28: ‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’? That would have been enough to rebut the Judaizers. The Galatians’ new identity, sons of God in Christ, supersedes the old division between Jews and Gentiles.

Why bring specifically *the Greeks* into it?

And again, given the context, if all that Paul wanted to do was to emphasize that the true gospel breaks down the division between Jew and Gentile, because both come to God through faith in Christ, why does he add: ‘neither slave nor free, there is no male and female’?

That is not necessary for rebutting the Judaizers.

The answer is: Paul wants to go wider and deeper. He’s not only thinking about the immediate presenting issue of Jew and Gentile, the immediate context. He’s taking the opportunity to think more widely and more deeply about the human situation of his readers and to work out the implications of the gospel for them – implications for human worth.

Paul is here stating three pairings, which were not only big divisions of *identity* in first-century culture, but were divisions which carried ideas of *worth*.⁸

Let’s consider the historical context of Paul’s first pairing: ‘neither Jew nor Greek’.

⁸ As pointed out by John Barclay, in his careful and thought-provoking book, *Paul and the Power of Grace* (Eerdmans, 2020).

Most people in Galatia were either Greeks or Jews and were *proud of it*.

Jews got their worth or value⁹ from being Jews, from the fact that they were the descendants of Abraham. They were the people who had received God's law and who worshipped the one true God. Jewish men were proud to bear the mark of circumcision, which God had given as a sign of his covenant with his people. Jews looked down on Greeks as worshippers of idols, and as immoral people, even as filthy dogs.

Greeks got their worth or value from being Greek. They had a proud history and culture of conquest, of philosophy, and of literature. They looked down on non-Greeks as barbarians, including those strange people who originated from Judea, who were called Jews. Those people followed bizarre food laws and refused to eat with anyone who was not a Jew. In Greek culture, the foreskin was a mark of the noble, unblemished male; but Jews practiced the barbaric custom of mutilating their male children by cutting off their foreskins.

Each community believed in their own worth and rejected the worth of the other. Circumcision divided Jew from Greek.

But now, in the new, mixed communities of Christian believers, not only is the division of identity between Jew and Greek left behind. More than that:

- the worth that counts is *not* the worth that comes from being a Jew or a Greek; instead,
- the worth that counts is the worth that comes from receiving the gift of Jesus Christ, the new clothes, the new identity, the gift of becoming a 'son of God'.

There is no greater honor than that.

And then Paul goes further. This undercutting of the usual divisions of worth isn't limited to ethnicity. It also extends into the distinction between slaves and free people.

That distinction wasn't merely social; it was enforced by the laws of the Roman empire, and the economy depended on it. Slaves were not valued as full persons, they were property:

- As property, slaves couldn't legally marry.
- As property, they could be sexually abused by their owners, at pleasure.
- As property, subject to certain restrictions, their owner could even kill them without legal consequence.

In the eyes of society, and in the eyes of the law, free people were worth much, much more than slaves. But Paul says there is: 'neither slave nor free.'

If slave-owners and slaves have acquired a new identity as sons of God, that means they are all valued as brothers. Your brother is not a piece of property.

⁹ Today, this 'worth' might be described as their social capital in their own community. But our exposition is not dependent on this modern terminology.

Even being free is no longer what is to be valued. Instead, even if you are a free person, your real worth comes not from that but from receiving Christ's gift.

So, the new vertical relationship with God has *new and revolutionary implications horizontally, for social life*:

- Jews and Greeks become one.
- Slaves become equals in God's family.
- Jews, Greeks, slaves, free, all have the same worth.

And if that's not radical enough, Paul goes yet further.

He quotes from the creation story in Genesis 1:27, where it says that God created mankind in his own image, 'male and female' he created them.

But Paul introduces his quotation of the scriptural phrase 'male and female' with the remarkable words: 'There is no'. There is no male and female? What's that about?

He's doing two things here.

The first thing is the same in principle as his rejection of the distinctions between Jew and Greek and between slave and free.

In first-century society, men were regarded as worth more than women. So, like 'Jew or Greek', and like 'slave or free', this is another pairing with connotations of value.

Men were thought of as superior and women as inferior. Women were said to be intellectually and morally deficient. The Greek philosopher Aristotle had taught that women were, in a sense, physically deformed men, and that the male, being superior, was more fitted to rule than the inferior female.¹⁰

Paul says: No; in Christ, women are not second class.

Under Jewish law, only men were circumcised. So, circumcision divided men from women. But, Paul says, all of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

In Jewish, Greek and Roman culture, daughters didn't have the same rights as sons. But in Christ both women and men become 'sons of God'. In other words, women and men are children of God who all have full rights of inheriting God's promises.

Thus in Christ, women and men have the same worth; they are truly equal, and have the same inheritance.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, II, 737 'Just as it sometimes happens that deformed offspring are produced by deformed parents, and sometimes not, so the offspring produced by a female are sometimes female, sometimes not, but male. The reason is that the female is as it were a deformed male; and the menstrual discharge is semen, though in an impure condition ...'

https://www.loebclassics.com/view/aristotle-generation_animals/1942/pb_LCL366.175.xml; Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book 1 Chapter 12 'the male is more fitted to rule than the female ... As between male and female this relationship of superior and inferior is permanent.'

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato is reported to have said he thanked God that he was 'born Greek and not barbarian, free and not slave, male and not female'.

And an ancient Jewish threefold blessing, which was supposed to be said daily by Jewish men, went like this: 'Blessed be you, O God, who has not made me a gentile, a woman or a slave.' Some modern Jewish scholars call that prayer the 'blessings of identity'.¹¹

Paul says: 'No, no, and no!' That's not how it is in Christ.

As 'sons' (metaphorically), men and women have the same identity in Christ and the same worth in Christ.

We understand Mike to acknowledge these truths about identity and worth.

But there's something else important going on here, which Mike's complementarian spectacles, and his consequent misunderstanding of Genesis, prevent him from seeing.

Purpose

Why does Paul put over his point by flatly contradicting Genesis chapter 1? 'There is no male and female.'

Isn't he supposed to follow Scripture, rather than contradict it?

Paul does this to point to the heart of what is going on. They are in a new time.

It's a new time, first, because with the coming of Christ the Jewish law has finished its function. Second, and even more significant, it's a new time because Jesus Christ has started a new creation.

The Genesis creation, the first creation, was damaged by sin, so that people were living in what Paul calls 'the present evil age' (1:4). But the first creation is being outgrown, because the new creation has started. The age to come, God's promised future, has broken into the present time.

This trajectory from the present age to the age to come, from the existing creation to the new creation, has been in Paul's mind since the very beginning of his letter and is still in his mind at the end:

¹¹ Kahn, Yoel. *The Three Morning Blessings "...Who Did Not Make Me...": A Historical Study of a Jewish Liturgical Text*. Ph.D. dissertation. Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA, 1999. Tabory, Joseph. 'The Benedictions of Self-Identity and the Changing Status of Women and of Orthodoxy.' *Kenishta: Studies of the Synagogue World* 1 (2001): 107-138. Wieder, Naphtali. "About the Blessings 'Goy - Slave - Woman,' 'Brute,' and 'Boor'" [Heb.]. *Sinai* 85 (1979): 97-115; reprinted in his *The Formation of Jewish Liturgy in the East and the West: A Collection of Essays* [Heb.]. I:199-218. Jerusalem, 1998. See [https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/sourcebook/shelo_asani_goy.htm#:~:text=CE\)%20that%20every%20\(Jewish\),earlier%20formulations%2C%20a%20boor](https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/sourcebook/shelo_asani_goy.htm#:~:text=CE)%20that%20every%20(Jewish),earlier%20formulations%2C%20a%20boor)).

‘... the Lord Jesus Christ ... gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age’ (1:3-4)

‘For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision [*literally* – nor a foreskin], but a new creation.’ (6:15)

Mike, because of his misunderstandings of Scripture, solemnly warns his audience to ‘be suspicious of any egalitarian argument that relies on a distinction between creation and new creation’ (0hr19mins).

But we didn’t write Galatians, the apostle Paul did.

And we didn’t claim that *what counts is new creation*; the apostle Paul did.

And we didn’t put the remarkable words ‘There is no’ in front of the phrase ‘male and female’, quoted from Genesis 1:27. Paul did. Because in Christ it is new creation that counts.

So, despite Mike’s reluctance, and remembering that *what counts is new creation*, let’s look again at how chapter 3 concludes:

‘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. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.’ (3:28-29)

Paul uses the word ‘heirs’. But heirs of what? What will those who belong to Christ inherit?

They are heirs of the new creation, which is the age to come, the kingdom of God, the renewal of all things, the perfect new heavens and earth which God has promised. We know that in the new creation things will be different from how they are in the first creation. Jesus said: ‘in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage’ (Matthew 22:30).

And for believers this is not only a *future* inheritance. The new creation has begun in believers’ hearts, through the gift of the Holy Spirit. As Paul says in 4:6:

‘because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts’

For the time being, the Galatian believers remain in their mortal bodies. But one day, at the future resurrection, God’s great work of new creation will be brought to completion.¹²

Seeing that Paul points to the new creation, we should understand that he has in mind not only a *new identity* and a *new worth* but also a *new purpose*.

Throughout the New Testament, God’s new-creation purpose for human beings is clear: to make us all like Jesus Christ, *sons who are like the one true Son*, conformed to his image, filled with the Spirit of God himself. We see that in Romans, in Ephesians, in Philippians, in 1 Peter, in

¹² In the new creation, humanity’s original calling to multiply, and to fill and subdue the earth will be fulfilled in a different way in and through Jesus Christ: Genesis 1:27-28; 1 Corinthians 15:24–25; Ephesians 1:23; 4:10.

1 John.¹³ That is why those human divisions of ethnicity, social class and sex are overcome in Christ: ‘you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Galatians 3:28).

In Galatians 5, Paul spells out what the new creation life should look like in the present time. After warning that those who live wickedly will not inherit the kingdom of God, Paul continues:

‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control’ (5:22-23)

That is the Spirit of the Son, the character of Jesus.

There is no male and female distinction in this. The goal is clear, and it is for men and women alike. The whole church, the body of Christ, is called to be a transformed community, displaying the Christlike life of the new creation, a foretaste of what is to come.

In the last thirty years, since the publication of the book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, some complementarian pastors and scholars have put a great deal of effort into trying to teach men how to be men and trying to teach women how to be women.

But that is not a biblical goal. The effort is doubtless sincere, but it is misdirected.

In the first creation, men are *created men*, and women are *created women* (Genesis 1 – 2). They don’t need to be taught to be what they already are.

There are plenty of instructions in the Bible about behavior in different human relationships but *there are no instructions in the Bible about how to be a man or how to be a woman*.¹⁴

That kind of teaching is a distraction from the biblical goal, which is the new-creation goal, that both men and women should become Christ-like – in love, in joy, in peace, in patience, in kindness, in goodness, in faithfulness, in gentleness, in self-control.

Jesus Christ is truly godly, the perfect human being. We are all called, men and women, to become like him – like the Son of God, full heirs according to the promise. God’s concern is not that we learn ‘biblical manhood’ or ‘biblical womanhood’, but that we become Christlike.

In sum, we are given a new *purpose*, a new-creation purpose, which involves both men and women being filled with God’s Spirit and changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. For men and women alike, that’s our biblical aim – ***not manhood or womanhood but Christhood***.

¹³ Romans 8:29 (conformed to the image of his Son); Ephesians 4:24 (the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness); Philippians 2:5 (have the same mindset as Christ Jesus); 1 Peter 2:21 (Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps); 1 John 3:2 (when Christ appears, we shall be like him).

¹⁴ It is right to acknowledge that we live in an imperfect world (Genesis 3; Romans 8:20–22); some people are born with intersex conditions and some people experience gender dysphoria during their lives, but this does not affect our point that we do not need instructions on how to be men or women.

Implications for social hierarchies based on perceived worth

Although in the circumstances of the Galatian letter there is a particular focus on overcoming Jewish perception of Gentiles as inferior others, we have seen that Paul takes the same approach to the social hierarchy of free or slave and the gender hierarchy of male or female. *What this means in practice is that the gospel abolishes hierarchical systems of worth rooted in ethnicity, social status, and gender.*

In Galatians, Paul briefly articulates a radical theology about the unity of slave and free in Christ. This idea introduces something of a culture quake, though it was first only experienced as an early tremor. Similarly, his letter to Philemon coaches a Christian master in Colossae on how to revise the way he will treat his returning slave, Onesimus. Since his flight, Onesimus had come to faith, and so now, along with this letter, Paul is sending him back to his 'owner' but with the understanding that the old status quo of their relationship cannot continue as it was.

Paul challenges Philemon to receive Onesimus 'no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. ... welcome him as you would welcome me' (Philemon 1:16-17). Philemon's brother cannot be treated as his property.

Holding Galatians and Philemon side by side, we notice that Paul deals with Jew–Gentile and free–slave tensions in the same way: *without denying the existence of the social differences, he seeks to dissolve the hierarchy as far as possible, by applying the uniting and equalizing power of the gospel.*¹⁵

In these examples, Paul overturns social hierarchies *in the way believers see and treat each other*: Jews to Greeks (and Greeks to Jews) in the Galatian church, and master to slave in the Colossian church. Paul is not obliterating their social differences, but the cross of Christ and the gift of the Spirit have begun to dissolve the discriminations, animosities, exclusions, and hierarchical norms that were for so long accepted and esteemed.

Though Paul in Galatians does not extrapolate what this all means for women and slaves, Paul is evidently dismantling social divisions of worth between believers. He envisions women, slaves and Gentiles as having the same value as others, with unity and equality in the body of Christ, where distinctions, though not fully eliminated, are to be profoundly minimized. *This is a truly radical idea.*

¹⁵ Similarly, dealing with the rich-poor tensions in the Corinthian church, in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul confronts the sinful way rich people in their community were treating the poor. He chastises them for stuffing themselves at the table of the Lord's Supper while leaving the poor to go hungry. He asks them (v22), '... do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing?' In the gospel, where rich and poor are joined together as the one body of Christ, a better way is: 'brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.' (v33, NIV).

Of course, in this present world there may remain valid bases for hierarchies – for example, of parents over young children or of civil governors over the governed. But the gospel has undermined ethnic, social and gender hierarchies.

Implications for ministry

In the light of this oneness of identity, oneness of worth, and oneness of purpose, it is legitimate to consider: is there any explicit biblical indication that Jew or Gentile, slave or free, men or women are allotted different ministry functions in their imitation of Christ in this present life, in anticipation of the fullness of the new creation?

Is any of these six groups subject to a restriction on Christlike character? No.

Is any of these six groups subject to a restriction on taking the lowest place in cross-shaped service? No.

Is any of these six groups subject to a restriction on the spiritual gifts that they may receive, in order to be equipped to serve? No. On the contrary. In 1 Corinthians 12:27-31 *Paul identifies the most prominent gifts as (first) apostles, (second) prophets and (third) teachers, and urges the congregation (without distinguishing Jew and Gentile, slave and free, men and women) to eagerly desire those greater gifts.*

In other articles in which we responded to Mike's problematic teaching, we have shown that in the early church there was a woman apostle ([Junia](#)), women prophets (Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 11 and 14; Philip's daughters in Acts 21:9), and women teachers ([Priscilla](#), and probably [Phoebe](#)).

The presence of these women in the biblical record comes as no surprise when we understand Galatians 3:28.

What would be surprising would be to find Paul saying what he says in Galatians 3:28, but then *not* find a readiness in him to partner with women in all aspects of church life, including suffering for the advancement of the gospel.

Romans 16 shows a perfect match between his theology and practice. Paul names 24 people in the Roman church. He gives special honor to nine of them by referring to their ministry. Of those nine, seven are women. And he honors two of the women for the suffering they have endured: Priscilla risked her life for him and the apostle Junia was in prison with him.

Is any of the six groups (Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female) subject to a restriction on the functions which they may be called to fulfil in God's church? It doesn't look likely.

Everyone agrees that in Christ, Jews or Gentiles may be elders. Everyone agrees that in Christ, slave or free may be elders.

So it appears probable, in light of Galatians 3:28, that women may also be elders, unless there is a clear statement somewhere which prohibits women's eldership.

Does Paul anywhere exclude women from eldership?

There are three Scripture passages about appointing elders: Acts 14:21-23; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9. None of them excludes women.

Mike claims in his Part 4 video that the passages in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus do indeed exclude women. But that claim cannot be supported from a close examination of the biblical text.

In our response to Mike's Part 4 video, we draw attention to elementary errors in Mike's hurried exposition, where he relies on English versions instead of examining the Greek text and fails to deal with the solid objections to his view. See <https://terranwilliams.com/what-winger-presently-gets-wrong-women-leaders-in-the-new-testament-part-a/>.

Prominent complementarian scholars who understand New Testament Greek, such as Tom Schreiner and Douglas Moo, acknowledge that the lists of qualifications set out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus do *not* exclude women.

The complementarian silver bullet?

For their restrictions on women as elders or pastors, such scholars instead rely fundamentally on 1 Timothy 2:11-15. For example, Tom Schreiner says:

'Women should not fill the role of pastor/elder/overseer. The fundamental text on this matter is 1 Timothy 2:11-15.'¹⁶

We will discuss that 'fundamental text' in response to Mike's Part 12 video. For now, we can notice Mike's conclusion on Galatians 3:28 and apply it to 1 Timothy 2.

Mike's notes say:

'we must look outside Galatians if we want teaching on men's and women's roles in marriage or church leadership. Hermeneutic principle: Passages that clearly teach on an issue need to be prioritized in giving clarity over passages that are only secondarily being applied to an issue.' (Also at 1hr 51mins in the video)

Let's apply that principle to 1 Timothy 2:11-15. The 'fundamental text' relied on by complementarians is not directed to any general question about who may lead the church as elders or pastors. In fact, elders and pastors are *not even mentioned in it*. So, it is contrary to principle that complementarians treat it as their silver bullet text, as if it said that women were not allowed to be elders or pastors.

We conclude: there is no clear statement anywhere in the Bible that women must not be church elders. And Galatians 3:28, when carefully understood in its context, presents a clear

¹⁶ *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (2005), 307.

truth about women's co-worthiness and unity with men in Christ. Those two things, taken together, cause the complementarian restriction on women's eldership to look seriously implausible.

<https://terranwilliams.com/what-winger-presently-gets-wrong-egalitarian-silver-bullet-galatians-328/>