PARITY FOR ALL: AN EXEGESIS OF GALATIANS 3:28

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Abstract

Parity is the condition of being equal especially as regards status or pay. The quest for parity has generated much passion in our contemporary society and the church, which has caused misinterpretation of Galatia 3:28 without proper care and attention to the context. This has led to feminism, quest for women ordination, confusion in the youth as regards gender role and caused marital problems. In the light of the above, this paper investigated the text using historical grammatical method of exegesis. It was discovered that everybody is equal before God in the issue of salvation but distinct in functions in the society and as members of Gods household. It concludes by insisting that using Galatians 3:28 to propose equality of Gender roles is unscriptural and contradicts Gods word.

Keywords: Parity, feminism, gender, egalitarianism, clamor, freedom

I. Introduction

The clamor for parity has generated much heat in our contemporary society. It is everyone's dream to be treated as fairly as the other person has been treated. Both male and female, white and black, bond and free, want to be treated just as fairly as possible without the deprivation of one's human right. This struggle has propelled people in history to agitate either for freedom or for independence. However, this clamor for parity is not only limited in the secular world, but is also dominant in Christendom, and consequently has led to lots of disagreements and disunities. It has affected the biblical method of interpretation and hermeneutics in biblical scholarship, and thus is a major debate among scholars, who either advocate for the obliteration of the biblical gender role distinctions and complementary relationship established at creation or for the maintenance of such role and relationship.

The resultant phenomenon of this clamor for parity in Christendom is the emergence of feminism, which Pipim (2001) sees as "the most powerful
ideology driving the campaign for women's ordination". Concerning the teriminus ad quo of this debate, Colin and Russell Standish (2003) aver that the sociological revolution of the post WWII era fuelled the feminist movement to destroy "the traditional, and more importantly, the biblical relationships between men and women". Consequently this role confusion of men and women has affected adversely the youth and has placed stresses upon marriages. The evolution of this phenomenon into feminist liberation theology, which one of its pioneer champions is Elizabeth S. Fiorenza in Hays (1996) has revolutionized the methods of biblical interpretations and hermeneutics in Christendom. Hays posits that Fiorenza hypnotizes that:

ethical use of the New Testament requires the difficult process of shifting through patriarchal texts in order to recover a lost history of women's experience that has been buried. The feminist biblical critic must try to restore what has been lost through interrogating these ancient texts with fresh questions, searching out hints and traces of a time at the beginning of Christian movement when women participated in the discipleship equals, and retelling in a critical light the story of the church suppression of women.

It is based on the above thesis that subsequent biblical feminists or egalitarians developed their liberation theology, opining for equality of male and female and using Galatians 3: 28 as one of their biblical supports. Pipim (2001) affirms that those “who have embraced feminism's mindset often site Paul's statement in Galatians 3: 28 —there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for all are one in Christ Jesus— as the key proof-text to justify their claim that the Bible teaches full equality between man and women”. They go to the extent of evading the clear straightforward reading of the text. Massey an advocate of egalitarianism, strongly postulates that “this proclamation of freedom and equality in Galatians 3: 28 is the key text for a summary of New Testament position on the status of women” (Massy 1989).

It is therefore, based on the above argument that this paper ascertains the problem it tends to address, hence, the necessity of the exegesis of Galatians 3:28 for the clarification of the biblical gender role distinctions. The objective of this research is to convey what the text in view meant to its recipients in the first century A.D and what it means to the contemporary Christian community. It also intends to bring to light what the author meant when he wrote "you are one in Christ" and tries to look at the content and context of the text, and establish its theology. This research significantly, contributes to the understanding and the interpretation of the text in line with exegetical and hermeneutical principles and serves as a great help for the harmonious
development of the readers' faith in trusting the Holy Writ of God. Its value is far reaching to the scholastic system, in providing a rich resource into the equality of believers without obliteration of gender roles. To the Christian world, it elucidates the validity of the of biblical gender role distinctions and helps in the strengthening of Christian faith and provides a base for better explanation of the text. Furthermore, this research employs the historical-grammatical method of biblical exegesis in the examination of the text in view.

II. Exegesis of Galatians 3:28

Before the exegesis of the text in view, it is necessary to delve into some introductory issues in the book of Galatians. Barr (1995) posits that Galatians "is one of Paul's most vigorous letters, harsh and insulting". He further states that the "insults, hyperbole, and ferocity of the epistle, give the impression of a passionate letter, dashed off in a moment of anger". Fee (2007) affirms that the book of "Galatians is intensely single-focused on the issue of Gentile observance of the law," especially circumcision. It is specifically and singularly given over to the question of salvation in Christ, made effective by the Spirit and is one of the most intensely Christocentric letters in the Pauline corpus. It is glaring that the dominant theme of the letter is freedom, which was the purpose of the death of Christ upon the cross (1: 3). Such freedom liberates the believers from bondage (2: 4; 4: 8), confinement (3: 23), custodianship (3: 24), minor child (4: 1), and slavery (4: 22). Barr (1995) affirms that "Galatians is a grand argument for freedom that retains its persuasive powers," till our contemporary time. It represents “Paul's attempt to present the gospel of Christ to Gentiles who felt constrained by fate, bound by powers beyond their control. For these Gentiles to be circumcised is an effort to protect themselves from such powers, which Paul argued, was to miss the essential of point of the gospel, namely, that Christ has already delivered his own from the powers of this age (1: 3)”.

A. Authorship of Galatia

Paul's authorship of the book of Galatians is evidenced from his usual way of introduction in almost all his epistles "Paul, an apostle—not from men but nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead...." (Gal. 1: 1. Cf. Rom. 1: 1; 1 Cor. 1: 1; 2Cor. 1: 1; Eph. l: 1, etc.). However, even in the midst of all the unobstructed evidences, some scholars still place doubt on Paul's authorship of the book that bears his signature. This argument for Paul's authorship of Galatia was introduced in the 19th century, when some scholars opined that the "letters ascribed to Paul were
the product of a 2nd century conflict between a Judaist party and liberals in the church" (Starmm, 1989). They suggested that Paulinists used the Paul's name and authority to write the letters and promote their own ideas. Nevertheless, this argument meets its Waterloo owing to the fact that the content and life situation of Paul's letters “could not have been invented without evidences of this latter date being betrayed, and the letters fit all the facts known from other sources concerning the origin of Christianity and its history during the middle decades of the first century”.

Because of Paul's character, religious experience and Christology as they appear in Galatians are consistent with the epistles to the Romans, Corinthians and other churches, the rejection of his authorship of Galatians seem illogical and incoherent. Stamm sees it as "a mood of extremist criticism". He further states that the "first explicit reference to Galatians as a letter of Paul is as late as the middle of the second century" however, it should be noted that an earlier canon, the canon of Marcion the Gnostic heretic, has put Galatia first in the list of the ten letters of Paul, and the orthodox Muratorian canon has put it as the sixth of Paul's letters. Its later explicit reference of Paul's authorship does not suppose that the epistle has been unknown and unread for a hundred years because some New Testament writers knew about the book, as well as some prominent church fathers acknowledged Paul's authorship of the epistle to the Galatians. From the overwhelming evidences provided by internal evidence (Gal. 6:11), the church fathers and other respected Bible scholars, it is therefore the assumption of this research that Paul is the author of the epistle to the Galatians.

B. Audience of Galatians

Although Paul's letters are occasioned by problems or requests from the communities or individuals for which he wrote to, however, the letters "differ significantly in content, but, from the point of view of form, they exhibit a consistent general pattern" (Connor, 1995). This consistent pattern of highlighting recipients in his letters is also spelt out in Gal. 1: 2, where it said: "unto the churches in Galatia". Richards posits that the "Galatians were a Celtic tribe originating in ancient Gaul, which was actually known as Galatia by the Greeks" (Richards, 1979). According to Guthrie (1970), "from the epistle itself, it is clear that the readers were called Galatians (3:1) and were grouped in what is described as the churches of Galatia (1:2), but there has been a great deal of discussion over the identification of these Galatians".

This argument centers on the geographical province of the recipient of this epistle. Some scholars opine that the geographical location of the Galatians to whom this epistle was addressed, was the Northern Province of Galatia while some subscribe to the Southern Province of Galatia, however, this argument is
not of so much interest to this research. Nevertheless, it is the supposition of this research that the epistle was addressed to the southern province of Galatia, because of cities like Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, which were mentioned in Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13; 14; Gal. 2).

C. Date of Galatians

The date of the epistle is determinant on the geographical province to which one subscribes. If one holds the southern theory, then the letter could have been written at Corinth after Paul's second and before his third missionary journey, but if the northern theory prevails, then it could have been written while Paul was at Ephesus (Cole, 1976). Since, the southern theory is the hypothesis of this research, therefore, it is assumed that the epistle was written shortly prior to the Jerusalem Council of circa 49 A.D.

D. Historical/Socio-Cultural Context

At the time Paul composed his letter to the Galatians, the situation in Galatia was characterized by the question: were circumcision necessary for salvation? Schoeps (1961) avers that the Judaizers "wished to compel the Galatians to undergo circumcision, so that they themselves might play an important part in the sight of men". Ehrman (2000) narrates that "after Paul converted a number of Gentiles to faith in Christ in the region of Galatia, other missionaries arrived on the scene, insisting that the believers must follow parts of the Jewish law in order to be fully right before God". The believers in this congregation were specifically requested to accept the Jewish rite of circumcision; thus this proposal, made Paul to be absolutely outraged. For Paul, Ehrman affirms, the "Gentiles who underwent circumcision showed a complete and absolute misunderstanding of the gospel, affront to God, and a rejection of justification", which Christ has provided. This was situation in the Galatia churches that prompted Paul to write his epistle to them, rebuking them of how soon they have forgotten all that he has taught them concerning salvation in Christ Jesus.

On the contrary, the situation that necessitated the letter was never on the issue of equality of gender role. However, a quick look at the concept of gender role in the ancient society, is necessary to clarify that gender inequality was not the circumstance facing the recipients of the epistle. This brief overview shows that the concept of gender role in the ancient society differs a lot from the Western form of feminism (Oyewole, 2012) and therefore it is incoherent to use the latter as a yard-stick to interpret the former. Based on this, it expedient to take a look into the social concept of gender role in the time of the text, so that we could cognize that the content and context of the periscope in view was
not on equality in terms of roles, rather parity in terms of the common wealth of salvation.

Jeffers opines that "women, like men, were expected to fulfill very specific roles in the society. A woman who stepped outside of those roles would not have been considered courageous and forward-looking; she would have been thought selfish and decadent" (Jeffers, 1999). He goes on to accentuate that the "Greco-Roman culture regarded women (with notable exceptions) as incapable of the level of intellectual ability achieved by men. It allotted to women the duty of child bearing and child rearing". However, in the Christian congregation, women were regarded both by Jesus and the apostles. Women played prominent roles in the success of the spreading of the gospel. Women like Mary Magdalene, Joana (Luke 24: 10), Lydia (Acts 16: 14, 40), Priscilla (Acts 18: 2-3), Phoebe (Rom. 16: 1-2), Chloe (1 Cor. 1: 11), etc. helped in the ministry of the gospel.

III. Exegesis of Galatians 3:28

The exegesis of Galatians 3:28 utilizes the historical grammatical method, bearing in mind that every Bible text can be interpreted and understood by paying attention to the literary structure and devices used in its construction. It also presupposes that God is actively involved in human affairs and history from the time of the Bible writer to that of the modern reader. The basic steps for the historical grammatical method of exegesis are employed.

A. Literary Unit of Galatians 3:28

The larger context of the pericope starts from 3: 6, when Paul urges his recipients to consider Abraham and the promise made to him by God, and ends in 4: 31, where he explains that all believers are now children of the free woman. However, to determine the immediate context is to an extent decisive, nevertheless, a cursory examination of the context shows that it starts from 3: 19-4: 7. The unit starts with Paul's argument for the purpose of the law and concludes with explanation of the pericope in view. It could be ascertained that the crux interpretum of verse 28 is found in 4:1- 7, where Paul tacitly explains his thesis or proposition of inclusion of all believers in the promise.

B. Genre of Galatians 3: 28

The genre of the immediate context could be determined firstly by determining the genre of the whole book. The book of Galatians, as suggested by Kennedy (1984), "is of great rhetorical interest", therefore it is an epistle
cast in a rhetorical form. It could therefore be posited that 3: 28 is a polemic rhetoric cast in a dogmatic form to prove the proposition that salvation is by justification through faith in Christ Jesus (Haword, 1979) which consequently unites all believers not minding the race, status or gender.

C. Chiastic Structure of the Immediate Context

A. The Purpose of the Law (3: 19-20, 24).

B. The Friendliness of the Law to the Promise (3: 21).

C. The Imprisonment to Sin and by the Law (3: 22-23).

D. The Entrance of Faith (3: 25a).

C'. The Accomplishments of Faith and Baptism in Christ (3: 25b-29).

B'. The Similarities between a Son and a Slave (4: 1-3).

A'. The Sending of God's Son and the Purpose of His Coming (4: 4-7).

D. Interpretation/Theology

The pericope starts with Paul's rhetorical question of the purpose of the law with the answer to the question at the same time. In addressing the question, Paul avers that the law was added because of transgressions until the Seed that was promised to Abraham came. The law however, was put by God, who is also the Mediator (3: 19-20). Paul also reiterates the purpose of the law in verse 24, where he unequivocally accentuates that the law was put as our escort to justification by faith offered by Christ to all who believe. Cole avers that the law "was added as a supplement because of sins and was valid until the posterity arrived to whom the promise had been made in the will"(Cole, 1976). Paul in verse 21 asks whether the law was in opposition to the promise, however, he firmly establishes that the law was absolutely not in opposition to the promise. He affirms that the law given to impart life, likewise brings righteousness. Cole suggests that: "Paul's dismissal of the idea with 'may it never be so', shows that such a thought comes near blasphemy, for it would imply inner conflict within the mind of God. The promise is from God; law is equally from God. It only remains to relate them in one coherent system".
In verses 22-23 Paul accentuates how the Scripture declares the whole world imprisoned to sin, in order that what was promised, which is given by faith through Christ, may be given to all who believe. The purpose of the imprisonment of the whole world declared by the Scripture is for all who believe might receive the promised salvation, given through Christ by faith. Howard posits that "the fulfillment of this promise came with the faithful act of Jesus. However, before this faith comes, the law was a restraining pedagogue" (Howard, 1979). More so, Cole (1976) affirms that "before faith entered the scene, we were held under arrest by the law, kept in gaol, awaiting the divine revelation of that faith that was to come". He further argues that the law-should be seen as our escort to lead us to Christ, so that we might be justified by trust, however, once faith has come, we are no longer under the authority of our escort, because we are all God's sons, through trust in Christ. This however, does not suggests the invalidation of the law, rather, its role in helping humanity seek for freedom.

In verse 25b, Paul highlights the presence of faith and consequently in verses 25b-29 explains the accomplishment of faith and that of baptism in Christ. Since faith has come, the believers are no longer under the supervision of the law, but enjoy freedom from its supervision because they have been liberated from restraints of the past. However, this liberty does not guarantee antinomianism, rather, it helps the believers to understand the place of the law in the history of salvation and its abiding witness to the character of God. Howard posits that "this faith is the faith of Christ, who, by keeping the promise of Abraham, brought salvation to non-law-abiding Gentiles and unity to mankind". It is expedient to note that the context of this pericope deals with the inclusion of uncircumcised Gentiles and the idea of sonship of believers through faith in Christ, hence justification by faith is the inclusion of all nations into the kingdom of God in fulfillment to the promise. Howard affirms that "justification for Paul is a pure act of grace which created unity among all nations under one God". Kee, Young and Froehlich (1965) unequivocally argue that since man is accepted by God on the basis of faith, circumcision, which the Judaizers had been insisting as a requisite for engrafting of the Gentiles into the salvific community, was not required from Abraham until after he had trusted God, and had been accepted by Him. Therefore, there is no place for any distinction between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, since all must come to God on the basis of faith.

According to Richardson (1979) verse 28, is Paul’s problematic Statement, he persuasively argues for the preservation of the freedom of all believers no matter their culture, status or gender, but does not opine for the obliteration of gender roles distinctions. Freeman (1974) counsels that while it is true that the Bible considers male and female as
one in Christ (Gal. 3: 26-28), and heirs together of the same grace (1 Pet. 3: 7), it does not imply, as present-day practice suggests, that their role as male and female have been abolished. On the contrary, the original relationship that God ordained between the sexes has never changed, wherein man is charged with responsible leadership both in home and the church, and woman is to be his helpmate and companion (Gen. 2: 18-24; 1 Cor. 11: 3, 7-9), in loving submission to him (Eph. 5:24, 33), guiding her household faithfully (1 Tim. 5:14), Hence, the fact of the oneness of the status of believers in Christ is not to be used as an escape from one's divinely ordained as a man or woman".

It should be noted that the usage of the text to advocate for the obliteration of gender role distinctions in Christendom could be as summed to be a Christianized model of the cult of Isis, Egyptian goddess, which Jeffers affirms to have attracted many women and "stressed the equality of women and men" (Pipim, 2001).

In 4:1-3, Paul explains what he meant in the previous verses as the similarities that exist between the slave and the son, who owns the whole estate but is subject to guardians and trustees until the time, which the father sets. However, when the believers were immature, they were in slavery under the basic principles of the world (4:1-3). But God, our Father, at the time set for the sons to inherit the estates, sent His Son, born of a woman, who was also under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that they might receive the full rights of sons, which is the inheritance of the estates (v.5-5). Owing to the sonship of believers, God sent the Spirit of His Son into the believers' hearts and consequently the Spirit inspires them to refer to God as their Father. Hence, the believers who were slaves prior to the revelation of the Son, are no longer slaves, but sons and consequently are made heirs to the promise by God.

IV. Application of Galatians 3:28 for Today's Christians

In the contemporary society, Galatia 3:28 according to Pipim, "has become the missing link for those attempting to import feminist egalitarianism into the church. These egalitarians argue that even though the arrival of Christ brought about the theological justification for the full equality of Jew/Gentile, free/slave, and male/female, the concomitant sociological changes were manifested gradually over a period of time" (Pipim, 2001). This parity clamoring movement sees this passage as a programmatic text for the obliteration of the gender role distinctions and consequently proposes that the progressiveness of the revelation of God puts the text as a long term, plan put by Paul to address the issues of Jew/Gentile, free/slave and male/female
dichotomies in the church progressively. This movement builds on what seems similar to the biblical truth of equality of human beings and distorts it. As Pipim (2001) notes that equality of all human beings is evident in biblical truth, which asserts that "both male and female were created in the image of God (Gen. 1: 27; Matt. 19: 4), both have been redeemed by Chris, so that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3: 28) and both are joint heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3: 7)". He argues that the relegation of women to second class status or make men superior and women inferior, which the egalitarians accept as true, can never be found anywhere in the Bible, therefore, a proposition of such theory is a misrepresentation of biblical teaching and an affront to the loving character of God, who created Eve to be an help meet for Adam.

From the foregoing, it could logically be inferred that the use of Galatians 3: 28 to propose the equality of gender roles is unscriptural and contradicts God's established functional distinctions between both genders. On the contrary, the passage emphasis unity in Christ and not in the sense of the obliteration of the functional otherness. Pipim unambiguously elucidates that "the context makes it clear that men and women are equal only in the sense that both are equally justified by faith (v. 24), equally free from the bondage of legalism (v. 25), equally children of God (v. 26), equally clothed with Christ (v. 27), equally possessed by Christ (v. 29) and equally heirs of the promises to Abraham (v. 29)".

Furthermore, he illuminates that each of the polar opposites in the text i.e. Jews/Gentiles, slaves/free, males/females, is designed by Paul to communicate the idea of universality. The first captures, from the Jewish religious stand point, the universality of humanity from a soterio-historical perspective. The second captures, from a Roman point of view, the primary legal distinction for dividing all people. While the third, from creation stand point, divides humanity according to their basic sexual identity given them at creation. Consequently, from Paul's take, "all of God's people regardless of how we view them, whether from the salvation-historical perspective of the Jews, or from the legal perspective of the Rome, or from the creation perspective of God, share in the same privilege of union with Christ. It is in this sense that male and female are equal", and not on the contrary. Just as the analogy of body in 1 Cor. 12: 12-30, where Paul uses the couplets: Jews/Greeks, slave/free, without the male/female couplet, to show that although the parts of the body are one, it does not however remove the role distinctions of each part. If the hand can say I am one with the eye, therefore, there is no role distinctions between us, one would imagine the chaos that would exists between both. Such is also the situation in the body of Christ, when believers advocate for the obliteration of God's established order of functional distinctions, the result is the disunity experienced by the church today.
V. Conclusion

Conclusively, the agitation for gender equality and consequent proof-texting of Galatians 3:28 to support the idea of parity is unscriptural and contradicts the principles of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. More so, any idea that affronts the loving character of God and established order is from the pit of hell and should not be encouraged among the Christian community of faith. Since this idea gender role obliteration is the revival of the ancient Egyptian Isis cult, it should therefore not be heard among believers, who claim to heed to the principles God established in His Holy Writ. However, believers should accept that everyone is equal before God and in the common of salvation, but distinct in functions even as members of that common wealth but must not be confuses as sameness as God gave divinely appointed role for His beloved daughters.

Reference


