

AN EXEGESIS OF GALATIANS 3: 26-29 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Gender discourse, or difference in sexual identities of mankind, is a recent and on-going debate in scholarship. However, many of the explanations given by various groups and movements in contemporary society, with regards to true distinctions between male and female, leadership roles, personality differences as well as racial distinctions, are contrary in part to the biblical injunctions and practices of the early Christians. The proposition of this study is that an appropriate understanding of Galatians 3: 26-29 will help reduce certain segregation and discriminatory attitude in the church, and will consequently foster unity in the operation and the fulfillment of the church mission. This study seeks to present biblical hermeneutic framework for relationship in the church community as well as determine the theological significance of "neither male nor female". It also attempts the exegesis of the text (Gal. 3: 26-29) using lexical analysis of some key words and phrases. The study focuses on the historical background of the book of Galatians and the identities of the Galatian churches with reference to the origin and forms of discrimination therein. The literary context and contextual analysis of the text were included in this research. This in addition to the translation from the original Greek text which considers other English translations. The attempt is both revealing and rewarding as it brings to light the relevance on the unity of persons in Christ as it relates to Christian community. The reality for both male and female is that God created us different; nevertheless, all believers in Christ should be considered as equals; all believers (Jews and Gentile, male and female, slave and free) are all equals before God, who is God of all. The theological significance of this work includes salvation and justification by faith, the work of Christ in addition to the creation of man, as male and female. The church should therefore begin earnestly to propagate the dignity of persons with respect to gender and racial differences. This exegetical study also recommends that women and men within the Christian community should see each other as one in Christ while accepting their differences in role play. It further suggests that Christian theological institutions should encourage the proposition of a theological framework that presents a biblical position of gender equality that stands in anti-thesis to the liberal interpretation of Gal. 3: 26-29.

5.2 CONCLUSION

Never could Apostle Paul have envisioned the place of Galatians 3:28 in contemporary evangelical literature. The issues of sexual equality and societal roles in modern society, however, have done what Paul could not have imagined. In fact, the text has taken on a large and, for some, a crucial place in the discussion of the roles of the sexes in the Church of Jesus Christ. While traditionally, commentators have discussed Paul's words in the context of the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith that has become a secondary matter. One can understand this to some extent, since the vigorous debate over sex roles has, in effect, lifted it from its exegetical underpinnings and set it as a lonely text, a kind of proof text, in the midst of swirling theological debate. This is not without justification, but it also is not without peril. The writer is referring to the human tendency to forget sound hermeneutics and find things that are not really in the text. To treat the church's historical understanding of Scripture lightly is to forget that it is the believing body that, through the centuries, carries on the theological enterprise with the Word in hand and accompanied by the enlightening Spirit.

Thus, the largest part of any theologian's work comes from reverent consideration and response to the Christian theological tradition. The creeds of the church, the results of serious spiritual and theological strife, are more important than the views of individuals. We should begin our discussions with the assumption that the church is probably right, unless exegetical and theological study compel us otherwise. "The proclamation of new

discoveries,” Abraham Kuyper, the famed founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, wrote, “is not always a proof of devotion to the truth, it is sometimes a tribute to self-esteem” (577).

There is no reason to claim that Galatians 3:28 support an egalitarianism of function in the church. It does plainly teach an egalitarianism of privilege in the covenantal union of believers in Christ. The Abrahamic promises, in their flowering by the Redeemer’s saving work, belong universally to the family of God. Questions of roles and functions in that body can only be answered by a consideration of other and later New Testament teaching. In conclusion, Galatians 3:28 is a magnificent text, and we should treat it as the apostle anticipates it to be; that is, for the glorious salvation by grace through faith and a polemic against justification by works.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The issue of discrimination of persons has given birth to various liberal movements both within and outside the church; whose views are anti-biblical. It portends serious challenges to what the church stand for. However, the situation can still be redeemed and brought under control, if concerted efforts are made. This work offers the following recommendations:

1. The church should begin in earnest to propagate the dignity of persons in respective of gender and racial differences
2. Effort should be made to address the cognitive distortions that may in part be responsible for the identity problem that some persons are experiencing in the church.

3. The church should encourage the full participation of persons with divine endowment in ministry without prejudice.
4. It is recommended that women and men within the Christian community should see each other as one in Christ while accepting their differences in role play.
5. It is also recommended that Christian theological institution should encourage the proposition of a theological framework that presents a biblical position of gender equality that stand in anti-thesis to the liberal interpretation of Galatians 3: 26-29.