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Written exegesis of Galatians 3:28

Setting: In his letter to Galatians up to this point, Paul has spent much ink in his effort to remove the obstacles that the Judaizers were placing in front of the Galatian congregations. They were insisting that the Gentile converts had to be circumcised in order to truly be sons of God. Paul wrote at length to remind the Galatians that the message they received was justification by faith, and not by works of the law. In the verses immediately preceding verse 28, he assures the Galatians that they are ALL sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus—a comfort to the Gentiles who were being told that they weren't really God's children, and a reminder to those Judaizers and to all that their salvation came not from works but by faith in Christ. Verse 28, then, continues in that strain.

Translation: There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is not male and female. Indeed, you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Exegesis:

ouk—The position of this negative particle at the beginning of the sentence gives it emphasis. It is certain and it is constant, especially combined with the present verb. “There is not, there is never.” The Judaizers made a big deal of whether one was a Jew or a Gentile, but Paul says it absolutely does NOT matter. It is translated here with “neither” to flow smoothly with the second negative, **oule**, that is connected to it.

esti—This is a shortened form **estih**, the 3rd person singular form of **estimi**. It never occurs without a negative. With **ouk** then it can be translated “there is no/not.” Its present tense and indicative mood convey that it is a factual, ongoing characteristic for the Galatians. There is not, at any time, any distinction that matters between God's children.

Joudaiej—The first negligible category or distinction that Paul mentions is “Jew.” This noun refers to that special race and religion that was God's chosen people ever since the covenant he made with Abraham. In this case it is placed in contrast to “Greek,” which will be mentioned below. This first category that Paul negates here flew in the face of the Judaizers and all who thought that being a Jew still meant a higher status in God's kingdom. “So you're a Jew?” Paul says, “So what! It matters not in God's eyes. All that matters is that you have faith in Christ Jesus.”

oule—This negative word is the combination of **ou**, the negative particle, and **de** conjunction. It ties this phrase to the previous negative, making the two nouns parallel. They are on the same plane because neither category really exists in God's kingdom, says Paul. It is best translated here with a “nor”—our word for the “and not” idea.

Elhn—There is not Jew, and neither is there Greek. The word can refer to a Greek by race—someone from Greece or born of Greek parents, or sometimes to anyone under the influence of Greek language and culture. As it stands here, placed in line with **Joudaiej** it is clear that it refers to Gentiles, non-Jews, in general. It is used in this sense elsewhere in the

New Testament. Paul is adding the other side of the coin here—doesn't matter if you're a Jew...doesn't matter if you're a Gentile, either.

ouj eoi—The negative particle and present verb are repeated here and used in the same sense as above, introducing another negative clause giving two more categories that are not ever important in God's kingdom.

douloj—A slave or servant, one who is bound to his master. Here it is used in contrast to **eDeuteroj**, a free man. A slave does not have the freedom to do as he chooses as does the free man; he must obey his master's will. This was the lowest social class during Paul's time. Being a slave would certainly be a huge weight on the shoulders of any man, making it impossible for him to be independent, to do his own business, to travel. But Paul says that this important social distinction is meaningless in God's eyes as far as salvation is concerned.

oule—Used again as before, connecting two parallel but contrasting nouns.

el deuteroj—A free man, used here in contrast to a slave, in a political and social sense. He had rights and privileges that a slave did not. Being free was important, and most slaves surely had the desire to be free. But Paul says that this category does not apply to spiritual matters, either.

ouj eoi—This phrase is used a third time to introduce another pair of nouns, categories, that do not really exist when it comes to salvation. By this third time the reader gets the feel of a list, a triad of pairs, that Paul is using to emphasize his point.

a@sen—This neuter (interestingly) adjective, used as a substantive, is well translated as *male*. It is used in contrast to *female* here. In contrast to other words for “man” (**anqrwpoj**), which emphasizes the human aspect, and **anhr**, which distinguishes man from woman, especially in a marriage situation when used with the article—husband as opposed to wife) **a@sen** puts a strong emphasis on the sex of a person as male instead of female.

kai—Paul uses a different conjunction here in the place of **oule** to join two contrasting nouns. The reason is not entirely clear. But **a@sen** almost always occurs with **qhlu**, joined by a **kai**. Perhaps it was such a “ham-and-eggs” type of pair, always used in such a phrase, that **kai** was most natural here. Nonetheless, the idea is still the same—these are two more categories that humans use to distinguish between people, even though their souls are all united in Christ.

qhlu—This is the neuter form of the three-ending adjective which is best translated as *female*, used here in opposition to **a@sen**, *male*, as above. It is sometimes used simply to denote a woman, but more often emphasizes gender and is usually accompanied by **a@sen**. This is the final distinction that man makes but that God does not make in his saving activity.

gar—A postpositive conjunction, **gar** connects this clause to the preceding phrases in an explanatory way. This phrase explains further what Paul has been saying in the past three

verses: “You are all sons of God...as many as (all who) were baptized, have clothed themselves with Christ...there are no distinctions...*indeed*, you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

paatej—This all-inclusive, quantitative, nominative plural adjective modifies the pronoun **u(ei)j**. “ALL of you”—every single one of you, not just some of you or certain groups of you, no matter what human group you fit into—“are ONE in Christ Jesus.” **Paatej** is in clear contrast to **eiD** creating a paradox that is exactly Paul’s point. How wonderful to know that this **paatej** includes us as well—we are one in Christ with all Christians, even those who lived in first century Galatia, in that we all have clothed ourselves with Christ!

u(ei)j—While **paatej** emphasized the all-inclusive nature of the statement, this nominative pronoun personalizes it. Paul says, “I am talking to all of YOU—you Galatians who believe in Jesus as their Savior and have clothed yourselves with him.” While the subject of the verb **eSte** would have been enough to direct the **paatej**, adding the pronoun makes sure this statement hits home for the readers (and that includes us!).

eSte—The second plural form of **eiD/**is in the active voice and the indicative mood. It is in the present tense, indicating an ongoing, continuous condition. Not “you were” or “you will be” or “you could be” but “you ARE, and always are, one in Christ.” It stands in sharp contrast to the preceding three verbs, all **ou) eD**. Paul first hammers away the things that AREN’T important, and then drives home what believers ARE—one in Christ Jesus. This linking verb is the “equal” sign between **paatej** and **ei)j**—a paradox as mentioned before.

ei)j—“One” completes that paradox. Logically, “one” is in contrast to “all”, but here the two are placed as one and the same by the linking verb **eSte**. This three letter word sums up Paul’s point that all believers, because they have all been clothed with Christ, have ONE (in other words, the SAME) status before God—declared not guilty. God makes no distinctions.

eD)Xristw)jhsou—This is certainly a very common phrase in the epistles. The prepositional phrase here modifies **ei)j**. It further explains the idea that ALL believers are ONE. That statement would not make sense were it not for the qualifying prepositional phrase that tells *how* we are one. Outside of Jesus we would simply be Greeks or Jews or Germans, slaves or freemen or students or professors, men or women. But in Jesus we are one. **En** carries the idea of “in the sphere of.” Only inside the sphere of Jesus and his saving work do all believers have the same one saved status before God. Outside of Jesus there is no salvation. The name **jhsou** calls to mind his saving work, and **Xristw)** tells that he is the Anointed One, the Messiah.

Summary: As the previous verses said, all believers are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Everyone who believes and has been baptized has put on Christ for his garment. Therefore, God no longer sees human distinctions. Those categories into which all humans fall on this earth do not even exist in God’s sight. Rather, all believers from all of those groups really are one and the same in his sight. They enjoy their one saved status in Christ because of what he has done for them. Paul will continue to use that rationale to make another point against the Judaizers by saying that since all are one in Christ, then all are also sons of Abraham. This is true

because they all share Abraham's faith and therefore share the same acquittal that Abraham has which only comes by faith.

Application: This is a good reminder for us that we have one and the same status before God with all believers—saved by faith alone in Christ. We all are clothed with Christ and therefore we all have the same relationship with God—acquitted because of what Christ has done. It is important to remember that the Holy Spirit is working through the Gospel everywhere and that there will be many people from other countries, cultures, and social classes who will join us in praising our Savior in heaven one day.