

*Neither Male nor Female** (Galatians 3:28)

Introduction

A little church in a remote area had been without a pastor for some time. Eventually, a daughter of the congregation, who had prepared for pastoral ministry by attending and graduating from seminary, came to serve the church as pastor. After seven years of ministry, she left the little church for a larger church. Following her departure, a young man was invited to candidate for the vacant pastoral position by preaching a trial sermon. While the people were filing out of church after the service, a little girl was heard to say to her mother, "I didn't know that men could be pastors too!"

This little tale is an example of how our local church practice often influences our view of social issues like the role of women in ministry. And then we tend to read the Bible in light of our own local church experience and practice. This tale also makes it sound as if ministry & leadership in the church is no longer a man's world. Yet many contemporary Christian congregations are in favour of keeping men dominant in church leadership roles and in many churches across the globe women continue to be restricted in the use of their gifts and if they do serve it's under the leadership of male authority figures. But is male dominance in church leadership and ministry really God's dream for his people?

At the outset, it must be conceded that there is no singular biblical voice on the subject. Some texts seem to support male hierarchy and others seem to support a relationship of equality. You have already explored one text that supports the traditional position of male dominance, 1 Timothy 2:11-12, a text that seems to encourage men to exercise leadership and authority over

women in the church. But now I want you to consider a biblical text that seems to point us in another direction, Galatians 3:28, a text that advocates a relationship of equality & partnership.

In his letter to the Galatians, which some scholars believe is our earliest NT writing (A.D. 49), Paul writes: "You are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:26-28).

This is the most forthright statement in the New Testament on the equality of women with men in God's new society we call the church. It is considered by some to be the Magna Carta of Humanity, the ultimate expression of a charter of freedom for the new humanity created in Jesus Christ. So everyone who takes God's Word seriously must ponder the meaning and implications of Paul's statement for congregational ministry and life in our day.

Paul's "neither male nor female" pairing is located at the conclusion of an argument about the sole condition for full inclusion in the Christian community (2:15-3:25). By faith in Christ Jesus both Jew and Gentile are justified before God, Paul argues. By faith in Christ both Jews and Gentiles receive the promised Holy Spirit and are incorporated into Christ's new community, the church. That's the thrust of Paul's argument in 2:15 to 3:25.

Then in 3:26, Paul spells-out the consequences of his argument for the Galatian Christians by defining their status before God and with one another in their faith community. He addresses them directly. The shift is from "we" to "you" (3:25 "we" to "3:26 "you), from law (3:25) to Christ (3:26), from

exclusiveness to inclusiveness. Unity or oneness in Christ is the dominant motif. Indeed, it brackets like bookends the entire passage under discussion. "You are all sons and daughters of God," says Paul in verse 3:26 and then again in verse 28 he says, "You are all one in Christ Jesus." Jews and Gentiles together constitute the people of God. Jewish Christians no longer point to the law as the sign of their identity, but to Christ. All Christians, both Jew and Gentile, belong to Christ. That's the main point Paul is making in our passage.

To make sure there is no misunderstanding, Paul highlights the status of all believers before God in Christ.

- Through faith, all believers are sons and daughters of God in Christ (vs. 26).
- Through baptism, all believers signify publically their admission into God's new society (vs. 3:27a)
- By putting on Christ, dressing themselves with Christ, or clothing themselves with Christ, all believers have undergone (past tense) a spiritual (vertical) & social (horizontal) transformation (vs. 27b).

Next, in three parallel statements, in the present tense, Paul announces the spiritual & social consequences of having clothed themselves with Christ. "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female" (3:28). In the third pairing, Paul asserts that male and female are one in Christ. Paul's terms here are not the normal Greek words for man and woman, but Greek terms that specifically focus on the gender distinctiveness of the sexes. All of this means that ethnic, social and sexual relations have been turned upside down in God's sight. Old distinctions, old divisions, and old separations, have been cancelled in Christ. And since oneness in Christ is already a reality in the sight of God, Christians ought to express this equality in God's new society, the church.

Unfortunately, in the history of the church there has been a tendency for some to limit the degree to which “there is no male or female.” Many have framed the new reality and the new relations of Galatians 3:28 only in spiritual terms, as a vertical reality before God with no horizontal or social implications for God’s people either yesterday or today. Indeed, it is often argued that the words “no male or female” relate simply to the common way men and women join the Christian community. All believers stand on equal ground at the foot of the cross, that is, we are all on the same spiritual level.

To be sure, there is little doubt that in all three pairings of Galatians 3:28 Paul thought first and foremost in terms of the relationship between God and humanity. When it comes to the basis of entry into the Christian community, all believers are on equal footing before God. Fellowship between God and humanity is no longer limited along national, social or sexual lines. All of this is indisputable. But to limit the meaning of this text to the spiritual dimension does not do it justice.

Paul’s proclamation is a message of equality that has both spiritual and social dimensions. Indeed, it speaks with meaning to all three areas of life where the gospel had a particular social impact on 1st century Christians – racial, social, and sexual. The totality of human life, including the concrete social historical particularity of human life in community, is being addressed by this text. Paul speaks without qualification or reservation in Galatians 3:28. His statement implies that, in the social arena of the local church, gender differences that divide and alienate male and female are suspended in Christ. They are both nullified as conditions for salvation and as social barriers between human beings in God’s new community.

Thus, when spelling-out the new relationships which are meant by God to exist in the church, Paul is saying that in the same way that Jews have no exclusive privileges over Gentiles and free persons have no exclusive advantages over slaves, so men are to have no exclusive prerogatives over women.

In this brief paper, I propose to “circle the biblical text” of Galatians 3:26-28, getting behind the text by considering those features of the historical context that influence its message & meaning, getting inside the text by considering its literary context in the larger corpus of Pauline writings, and getting in front of the text by considering the text in the context of Paul’s practice in the churches. In this way, I hope to demonstrate that in Paul’s mind the status of Gentiles, slaves and women has been equalized with that of Jews, free persons and males within the Christian community. For Paul, all three pairings have equal standing before God spiritually (vertical) and socially (horizontal).

- Part One - Getting Behind the Text

Galatians 3:28 can only be appreciated against the backdrop of the status of men and women in the ancient world and the prior history of the threefold pairing (neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female) in the baptismal ceremonies of the early church.

1) The Jewish Thanksgiving Formula

The revolutionary nature of Paul’s words in Galatians 3:28 is best understood against the backdrop of the status of men and women in the ancient world. It is important to understand that Paul’s threefold affirmation corresponds to both Greek and Jewish formulas where the distinctions are retained.

In the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day the status of women is reflected in the popular prayer of Greek men. A typical Greco-Roman man thanked the gods that "he was born a human being and not a beast, a man and not a woman, and a Greek and not a barbarian" [Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum* 1.33]. Admittedly, Greek literature often affirms the equality of women and men in principle, but Greek society rarely achieved it in practice.

In Jewish circles a similar thanksgiving formula was commonly used. At the beginning of morning prayers in the synagogue, the free male Jew prayed: "Blessed be God that he did not make me a Gentile; blessed be God that he did not make me an ignorant peasant or slave; blessed be God that he did not make me a woman" [S. Singer, *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, London, 1939, p. 5].

The reason for this threefold thanksgiving by free male Jews was not blatant demeaning of Gentiles, slaves and women, but rather that these persons were restricted from many religious privileges open to free Jewish males. For example, consider the religious situation of male and female persons. In the Temple, the main sanctuary was reserved for men, while women were relegated to a lower level outside the sanctuary, called the Court of Women. In the synagogue a screen separated women from men, symbolizing a woman's restricted role in the service and women were not normally allowed to participate in the actual service. Further, the study of the Torah was off-limits for women, as illustrated in the modern movie *Yentl*, starring Barbara Streisand. And finally, a married woman's role was essentially limited to homemaking. While exceptions can be cited, nowhere in ancient Judaism was any real effort made to practice, or even propose, the social and religious equality of the sexes (see Frank &

Evelyn Stagg, *Women in the World of Jesus*. Westminster Press, 1978).

In contrast to this historical situation of free Jewish male religious privileges and prerogatives, Paul writes that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." Paul himself was likely raised to thank God that he was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. If so, he knew that Galatians 3:28 deliberately contradicted each phrase of his former daily prayer. Yet he unabashedly announces that in God's new community racial, social, and gender related privileges and perks are abolished, "for you are all one in Christ." Notice: it is the religious privileges and perks of free male Jews that have been eliminated in Christ's new community.

2) Baptism into Christ's Community

It is also significant that in the passage under consideration (Galatians 3:26-29), we find Paul's only explicit reference to baptism in the entire letter: "for all of you were baptized into Christ Jesus" (verse. 27). Scholars are largely agreed that the formulation of the three relational categories mentioned in Galatians 3:28 has a prior history as a formula used in the context of the baptismal ceremonies of the early church [see Daniel P. Fuller, "Paul and Galatians 3:28," *TSF Bulletin* (November-December 1985) p. 9]. Indeed, when Paul's converts were baptized, they likely heard words like Galatians 3:28 spoken to them. Now Paul reminds them of their baptism in water and its implications for their communal life.

This conviction is supported by the fact that the pairings of Galatians 3:28 are found elsewhere in Paul's writings and always in direct or indirect association with baptism. For example, in 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul says, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks,

slaves or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” Here the pairings occur in abbreviated form, but in the same order.

And again in Colossians 3:11, Paul says, “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all in all, and is in all.” Now the pairings are in expanded form and in the same order. Also, the pairings are indirectly associated with baptism, as 2:12 and 3:9-10 indicate.

All of this suggests that these pairings were originally used in a baptismal setting in the early church. This is important for our interpretation of Galatians 3:28 because conversion and baptism are not identical in Paul’s view. Conversion is something that happens to a person by grace and through faith. Baptism depicts and provides a means of formally recognizing the conversion & transformation of a believer before the congregation as a social entity. Baptism was the outward sign of admission to God’s new community. In other words, conversion integrates a person into Christ spiritually, while baptism reinforces the converts experience socially.

At some point in the baptismal ceremony, perhaps as the newly baptized Christians were extended the right hand of fellowship and welcomed into God’s new society, an elder or church leader informed them of their status as sons and daughters of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Then he explained how their oneness in Jesus Christ made the differences between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female irrelevant in God’s new society, the church.

In this way the early Christians celebrated, in their baptismal ceremony, the marvellous truth that in Jesus Christ

the old racial, social and sexual divisions are being healed. There is a new social dynamic within God's faith community in which there is "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." In this way all believers are called to treat all people, irrespective of race, class or gender, impartially and to express in daily life those attitudes and actions that eliminate barriers of privilege, prejudice and inequality.

- Part Two -
Getting Inside the Text

There are two features of our text unit (Galatians 3:26-28) that warrant special attention: first, the "clothed or dressed with Christ" metaphor and second, the emphasis on unity or oneness that is so prominent in our passage. Both of these considerations help us to grasp the significance & meaning of our primary text, Galatians 3:28.

1) Clothed with Christ Metaphor

Verse 27 stresses that those "who were baptized into Christ have clothed or dressed (themselves) with Christ" (3:27). It is often assumed that this is an allusion to the baptismal practice of disrobing and then enrobing, perhaps with a new robe after the baptismal event, but there is little evidence that this was the practice during NT times.

As NT scholars point-out, several Pauline texts like Romans 13:14, Colossians 3:10-12, and Ephesians 4:24 speak of "putting on Christ" as the epitome of Christian ethical practice (see James Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 205). Both the Colossian and Ephesian texts suggest that when a person converted and was baptized there was instruction given about living a new life and living in the likeness of God and not in old ways.

Indeed, what Paul is referring to here by speaking of "having clothed or dressed yourselves with Christ" (vs. 27) is the basic instructions the Galatians likely received from Paul himself when they converted and were baptized. They had been joined to Christ, and this in turn made incumbent upon them the task of putting on the mantle of Christ, that is, acting as Christ acted, following the basic pattern of his life as presented by Paul. To live in him means to live like him, in particular, adopting his servant mindset (Philippians 2:1-11) and abandoning over/under & superior/inferior sorts of relationships in God's new community.

In this context of having put on Christ (having dressed themselves with Christ or having clothed themselves with Christ), verse 28 with its three pairings spells-out the social consequences of being joined to Christ and the body of Christ. It is important that we recognize that Paul is not simply suggesting that this is God's view of the situation, namely, that all ethnic, social and sexual differences do not matter because all Christians are one in Christ. This is of course true, but it is not the whole point. Paul is trying to hammer home, to his own converts, the social implications of the gospel which transforms ethnic, social and sexual categories and eliminates them as barriers to religious roles and functions in the setting of the local church.

2) Unity in Christ

After Paul states that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female," he speaks of the fact that all who are in Christ are "one" (3:28). This "oneness" or "unity" begs the question: so what happens to the racial, social and sexual differences between people? Does Paul mean that the differences between race, rank and sex no longer exist? Not at all! If Paul himself is a model, one must say that the differences

between the categories remain. For example, Paul continues to reflect a Jewish identity and self-awareness (Galatians 2:15; 2 Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:5; Romans 11:14). Paul continues to treat Jews and Gentiles as distinct ethnic peoples (Romans 9-11). He continues to address slaves and slave-owners as such. Paul continues to treat women as women and men as men (Romans 16). Therefore, the oneness which he declares is not one in which ethnic, social and sexual distinctions disappear and no longer exist.

Rather, it is a unity in which the barriers and hostility between the three categories are destroyed, and are rendered null and void. Sexually specific differences are not denied for the sake of some abstract equality. Indeed, Paul himself is not really concerned with such abstractions; he is concerned with the practical and everyday affairs of church life in which men and women, like Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, are here and now sons and daughters in God's community, serving together for the sake of God's mission in the world. It is not their distinctiveness, but their inequality of religious role, that is abolished in Christ Jesus.

All of this means that religious advantages in God's community based on gender distinctions are eliminated and gender determined religious roles within the Christian community are broken. In the same way that Jews are to have no advantages over Gentiles and free persons are to have no advantages over slaves when it comes to ministry roles in the church, so men are to have no advantages over women. In other words, if the Jew/Gentile and slave/free distinction is considered irrelevant within the church when it comes to service in Christ's name, then the male/female distinction should also be considered irrelevant "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28).

The new creation in Christ is the old one transformed and transfigured. Ethnic, social and sexual distinctions continue to exist, to be sure, but in Christ they neither determine one's salvation nor one's role in the body of Christ. It is also fair to say that being in Christ and being led by the Spirit determines the roles individual believers play in the Christian community. That is, God calls us and by his Spirit gifts us for the ministries to which he calls us. And when God's Spirit dispenses his gifts, he does not do so on the basis of ethnicity, social status or gender! Thus, here in the very heart of this letter to the Galatian believers, Paul articulates a vision of God's new community that challenges us today.

- Part Three -

Getting In Front of the Text

Scripture shapes and forms our practice & behaviour in the setting of our faith communities. This was also true for the Apostle Paul. He too was formed and shaped by the gospel message. Here we want to consider Pauline practice as evidenced in the Pauline corpus.

1) Paul's Critique of Peter

A major piece of evidence in support of the social dimensions of the Jew/Gentile pairing, and thus the social dimension of the entire triad of pairings, concerns Paul's strong criticism of Jewish believers who had withdrawn from table fellowship with Gentile believers. Paul confronts Peter about this matter at Antioch, a story that is told in Galatians 2:11-21. This episode in Paul's life demonstrates clearly that Paul saw the social implications of the equalizing of Jew and Gentile in Christ. Paul did not say that Jews and Greeks are one with respect to personal salvation, but that in other aspects, such as eating at social gatherings, things remain as they always have

been with Jewish Christians eating separately and apart from Gentile Christians. To the contrary, he defended the right of Gentile Christians to be present with Jewish Christians at social gatherings and on an equal basis with no distinctions separating them. He insisted on complete social equality between Jew and Gentile, for he believed that the new unity in Christ is intended to shape, form and influence the way Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians relate to one another in social settings.

2) Paul's Appeal to Philemon

Additional support for the social dimensions of the free person/slave pairing, and by extension the entire triad of pairings, is also implied in Paul's dealing with Onesimus, the runaway slave, a story described in Paul's letter to Philemon. This story demonstrates that Paul had begun to grapple with the social implications of slave and free person in Christ. Paul reluctantly returns the runaway slave Onesimus, who has become a Christian, to his master Philemon. Although Paul politely hints to Philemon that he should set his slave free ("I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do," vs. 8), he did not confront Philemon directly on the slave issue like he did Peter on the issue of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians eating together. Instead, in his customary style, he appeals to Philemon by writing a moving letter on the equality that binds all persons who have been clothed in Christ. Onesimus is "no longer a slave, but better than a slave, a dear brother." Within the organic unity of the church of Colossae, slaves and free persons are now brothers and sisters in Christ. That is, the church provided a setting in which the master-slave relationship was irrelevant. Indeed, Philemon is to welcome Onesimus as if he were the apostle Paul himself (vs. 17). If it could be established that Philemon's slave was the Onesimus who became the bishop of Ephesus half-a-century later, this would provide sufficient evidence that a (former) slave status was no barrier to church

leadership roles in the church (see J. Knox, *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul*. London, 1960, p. 88-92).

Thus, in light of this larger context, overcoming the Jew/Gentile and slave/free divisions, is, for Paul, not just a matter of spiritual transcendence but of social relational transformation. If a Gentile Christian may exercise spiritual leadership in the local church as freely as a Jewish Christian or a Christian slave as freely as a Christian free person, why not a Christian woman as freely as a man?

3) Pauline Practice in the Churches

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the social dimension of the male/female pairing is based on Paul's own practice. Paul's talk about sexual equality in Christ did not simply remain at the theoretical level and it didn't remain at the spiritual or vertical level. Women played a significant role in Paul's churches and served alongside of him in various roles and capacities. Paul's greetings to his fellow workers in Romans 16 and elsewhere indicates something of his attitude toward women in the church and reflects his practice of liberating women for ministry. Paul greets by name no fewer than six women in Romans 16, and all six are spoken of as having participated in some form of Christian ministry & leadership roles alongside men.

He begins the chapter commending Phoebe (vs. 1-2), who is described as "a servant or deacon" (vs. 1), which is a term designating a church leader in texts like 1 Corinthians 3:5 and 2 Corinthians 3:6, 6:4, 11:5, 23. It also refers to missionaries, including Paul himself. Phoebe likely functioned as a leader of the local church in Cenchrea. The second term associated with Phoebe confirms this impression. She is called a "helper to many people" (vs. 2). Behind this English word "helper" is the Greek term *prostatis*, which means patron or protectress. Recent

research has shown that patronesses were persons of high social standing and means with homes large enough for the local church to gather. Such women were responsible for the ordering of the congregation in their home and presiding over the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Phoebe was such a significant woman that Paul instructed the Roman churches to "receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and give her any help she may need" (16:2). Such hospitality instructions are common in ancient literature. They ask people to "roll out the red carpet" for important people. In other words, Phoebe is to be received with the honour appropriate to her role as a congregational leader.

After his commendation of Phoebe, Paul greets a number of persons by name. Five are women, and all five are spoken of as having participated in Christian ministry. First, there is Prisca or Priscilla, together with her husband Aquila, who began house churches in Ephesus (Romans 16:3-5), Rome (1 Corinthians 16:19) and possibly in Corinth (Acts 18:18-19). In the New Testament Prisca's name is more often than not placed before her husband's, as here in Romans 16. Maybe she was the more prominent worker & leader of the two in the church, we don't know for sure. In any case, according to Luke, Paul first met Prisca and Aquila in Corinth where they worked together in the tentmaking industry. Later, Prisca and Aquila joined Paul in Ephesus where they helped Paul plant the church of Ephesus and other churches in Asia Minor (19:26). In addition, Prisca and Aquila mentored and "explained the way of God more adequately" to the famous evangelist Apollos of Alexandria (Acts 18:26). Here in Romans 16 Paul claims they "risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful for them" (16:4). Indeed, at this point in their lives, they are leaders of one of the house churches in Rome that meets in their home (16:5).

Second, Paul greets four other women: *Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis*. Each woman is commended for having worked hard in the Lord (16:6, 12). The emphasis on working is characteristic of Paul's remarks about each woman whom he greets.

Third, two other women are mentioned in Paul's letter to God's people in Philippi, *Euodia and Syntyche*. They are described as women "who have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel" (Philippians 4:2-3).

Clearly Paul considered women to be full members of the Christian community. He does not speak of women in a condescending or patronizing fashion. Indeed, one gets the distinct impression that he happily worked side by side with a number of women in his various missionary travels and saw them as partners and not subordinates. The powerful statement that Paul makes in Galatians 3:28 is that "in Christ Jesus," that is, in the new, concrete historical community of Jesus' followers, the body of Christ, the culturally prescribed and religiously sanctioned up-down power categories can no longer be maintained. A new order has been brought into being, in which the old superior-inferior structures of ethnicity (Jew/Greek), social class (free/slave) and gender (male/female) are being overcome. Paul knew that "the present form of this world is passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:31).

Conclusion

To sum up, the Pauline epistles and the record of Acts show that the battle for the full equality of Gentile and Jew in the churches – though difficult and plagued by frequent set backs – was fought and won. In Christ's body, there could be "no longer Jew and Gentile."

It is equally clear that the seeds of the “no longer” principle for the transformation of the freeperson/slave and male/female relationships were sown in more stony ground. It was ground saturated with centuries-old, deeply ingrained attitudes, mores and practices that promoted the social and essential inferiority of slaves and women. And yet the seeds were sown for the eventual abolition of these dehumanizing, demeaning and marginalizing power-over relationships. In numerous places in the New Testament churches, these seeds germinated and grew.

But this initial growth virtually ground to a halt for centuries, as the old orders of hierarchical power patterns reasserted themselves, and in many ways, persist in our own time within the life, practices and attitudes of the body of Christ. The tragedy is that reductionist readings of Scripture have significantly contributed to and perpetuated this state of affairs. In the case of Galatians 3:27-28, the “spiritualizing” of the text has robbed the text of its power to challenge the legitimacy of the socially and historically grounded power structures and superior-inferior status relationships. The radically transformative vision of the “no longer” principle of our text has been reduced by its spiritualizing interpretation. We have done violence to its essential meaning and message and it cries out to be heard again for what it truly is, the charter of Christian freedom.

What then do we do with restrictive NT texts that seem to point in the direction of male only leadership in the church? F.F. Bruce put the matter cogently when he says, “Paul states the basic principle here in Galatians 3:28: if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, as in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 or 1 Timothy 2:11-12, they are to be understood in

relation to Galatians 3:28, and not vice versa' (*Galatians*, p. 190).

In my judgment equality is the biblical ideal, reflecting how God acts, as depicted throughout the Bible. However, there seems to be some evidence that patriarchy was sometimes allowed by God, when his saving mission was in jeopardy for God has larger kingdom purposes in mind, and 1Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 are cases in point.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul repeatedly expresses deep concern for the success of God's mission in Ephesus (2:3-5; 3:14-15; 4:15-16; 6:18-19). He restricts the role of women in ministry in this instance, so that the behaviour of some of the people of God in this setting would not impede or interfere with God's mission in Ephesus (1Timothy 2:4). As John Stackhouse writes: "When society was patriarchal, as it was in the New Testament context, and as it has been everywhere in the world except in modern society in our day, the church avoided scandal by going along with it – fundamentally evil as patriarchy was and is' (see *Finally Feminist*, p. 56). However, in North America today, an egalitarian approach to ministry would not hinder God's missionary cause. Indeed, the opposite is the case. North American churches entrenched in patriarchy potentially reduce the gospel's attractiveness to outsiders. Stackhouse aptly says, "Now that modern society is at least officially egalitarian, the scandal is that the church is not going along with society, not rejoicing in the unprecedented freedom to let women and men serve according to gift and call without an arbitrary gender line. The scandal impedes both the evangelism of others and the edification... of those already converted (p. 56).

In the final analysis, Paul's restriction of women in public worship and church leadership in Ephesus and Corinth of the 1st

century was necessary in part because something peculiar was going on these local churches that threatened the success of God's mission. Texts like 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 placed restrictions on women for good local reasons; they were designed to address local first-century violations of the rules of propriety and the status of women in the first century.

Accordingly, the restrictions should be interpreted as culturally shaped prohibitions that are no longer binding in a different cultural context like North America in the 21st century. As numerous Mennonite Brethren scholars have argued (John E. Toews, Allen Guenther, David Ewert—see *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy*. Kindred Productions, 1992, pp. 137-156; 17-30; and 47-60 respectively), these restrictive texts deal with problems peculiar to these two Pauline churches of a past era and we should not absolutize these biblical prohibitions which were designed to address unique local first-century issues that no longer prevail in our cultural context.

* A revision of "Neither Male nor Female" by Dr. Raymond O. Bystrom in *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Women in Ministry in the Church*. Edited by John E. Toews, Valeria Rempel, and Katie Funk Wiebe. Kindred Productions, 1992, pp. 89-103.