

**28–29 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua. And if you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.**

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Paul now gives a ringing conclusion to his overall argument of this section, namely, that in terms of standing justified before the Almighty (note the emphasis upon justification in v. 26), neither one’s ethnic status, economic status, or gender made any difference. The only way that anyone can be justified in the eyes of the Righteous One is to be declared righteous on the basis of Yeshua’s salvific work in His death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession (cf. Rom 8:34).

The three pairs which Paul lists here most certainly describe what, in his day, were groups of people who’s status separated them in one way or another. That the current *halachah* attempted to keep Jews and Gentiles separate is clear, especially in matters akin to table fellowship. This was demonstrated by Peter and his unwillingness to eat with the Gentile believers except when it would have been kept secret from his Jewish colleagues in Jerusalem. Paul usually contrasts Jews by the terms “Greek” or “barbarian,”<sup>80</sup> reflecting the Hellenistic world of his day. He does use the term “Gentile” (ἔθνος, *ethnos*) as a contrast to “Jew” as well.<sup>81</sup> In the end, whether he uses “Greek” or “Gentile” to contrast “Jew,” the meaning appears to be the same. Indeed, from a Jewish perspective, the world was divided into only two groups: Jews and non-Jews (Greeks or Gentiles).

Why does Paul add the second and third pairs here, however?<sup>82</sup> At first glance, it does not seem to further his specific argument to the Influencers. However, the foundational axiom of the Influencers was that right standing before God was the result of one’s status, and it is this presupposition that Paul has been attacking. To add the other parallels, then, is quite understandable.

In the liturgy of the Morning Prayers, the following are found:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שְׁלֹא עָשִׂי גּוֹי  
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe,  
Who did not make me a Gentile.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שְׁלֹא עָשִׂי עֶבֶד  
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe,  
Who did not make me a slave  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שְׁלֹא עָשִׂי אִשָּׁה  
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe,  
Who did not make me a woman.<sup>83</sup>

80 Rom 1:16; 2:9; 10:12; 1Cor 14:11; Gal 2:3; 3:28; Col 3:11.

81 Rom 3:29; 9:24; 1Cor 1:23; Gal 2:14-15.

82 There is a slight difference in the way Paul lists the three contrasting groups. The first and second are identical in their format, using “neither ... nor” (οὐκ ἔνι . . . οὐδέ). In the third however, the Greek has “there is neither male and female,” οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ, which may be influenced by Gen 1:27. In context, however, the meaning is the same.

83 cf. m.*Berchot* 3.3; 7.2 in which women, slaves, and minors are exempt from participation in certain prayers. The blessings of the morning prayers cited above are not necessarily disparaging of Greeks, slaves, and women, but the explanation is given that these groups, being exempt from some of the *mitzvot* given to free male Jews, are less fortunate, and thus one is privileged to be a Jewish male to whom were given the greatest number of

It is not certain how old these “blessings” are, but it is remarkable that Paul puts his list in exactly the same order. The Yerushalmi (y.*Berchot* 7.18) has this threefold blessing ascribed to R. Y’hudah b. Elai while the Bavli credits it to R. Me’ir (cf. b.*Menachot* 43b). Since both of these rabbis were Tannaim of the mid-second Century, we may presume the blessing was well in place as a liturgical element by 150 CE. Given this fact, it is likely that the inferior status of non-Jews, slaves, and women was a teaching in the earlier decades, and therefore formed a convenient list for Paul as he made his theological point.

What is the point for our study? In each case, the separation of the three sets of people (Jew/Greek; slave/free; male/female) is based upon the respective status of each group. For Paul, the method by which one enters the *kehilah* of Messiah is completely through faith in what He has done, and in no way based upon personal status, whether ethnic, economic, or gender. This is his point: all who are “in Messiah” are justified by faith and thus all are equally justified—there are no levels of righteousness in the eyes of God for those who are in His Son. Thus, the equality Paul stresses here is one’s standing as righteous before God.

Surely he is not suggesting that ethnic distinctions were erased in Yeshua, any more than he was teaching that slaves become politically freemen when they believed, or that gender distinctions disappear for those who have confessed Yeshua! Such a reading of the text would be preposterous. That Paul taught distinct roles for various classes of people within the community of believers is clear. But he is not arguing issues of role here, but of how one “gets into” the collective people of God and is therefore counted as righteous.

Elsewhere Paul expects slaves to obey their masters<sup>84</sup> and masters to treat their slaves with equity.<sup>85</sup> He expects women to remain silent in specific situations<sup>86</sup> and restricts them from the office of authoritative teaching.<sup>87</sup> Such allocation of various roles within the body of Messiah in no way demeans one’s character or person. In the same way that the Father, Son, and Spirit are mysteriously one yet function in some distinct roles, so the body of Messiah is one yet with many members functioning in their God-given capacities.

But this is not Paul’s purpose here, i.e., to describe the various roles that people have within the community of believers.<sup>88</sup> Rather, his purpose is to affirm with the utmost sincerity that, in matters of justification (being declared righteous by God), all who have exercised a genuine faith in Yeshua stand equal before the Lord.

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commandments.

84 Eph 6:5-6; Col 3:22; 1Tim 6:1.

85 Col 4:1.

86 1Cor 14:34-35.

87 1Tim 2:11f. I recognize the current controversies over the meaning of this text, but it seems clear to me that while women were given high privilege in the Apostolic community, they were, nonetheless, forbidden to hold the office of Overseer to which is attached the responsibility for guarding the Apostolic message (1Tim 3:1ff). That the qualifications for Overseer are clearly given with only men in mind seems most obvious from Paul’s language.

88 See my comments on Gal 3:28 in “An Assessment of the ‘Divine Invitation’ Teaching,” (2009), pp. 30–31, [www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html](http://www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html). Cf. Excursus below, pp. 215ff.

“But,” some might ask, “what are the practical ramifications of this equality in justification? Is it entirely theoretical or does it work its way out in the everyday life of the believing community?” Most certainly it works its way out in the everyday life of the community! First, it is on the basis of our equal righteousness in Yeshua that we view each other as having equal value. All are endowed with the Spirit, and therefore all are necessary for the proper functioning of the body (cf. Eph 4). Because of this, we are eager to listen to all and to appreciate the part they bring to the collective whole. Secondly, we care for each other equally. We bear each other’s burdens, not on the basis of ethnic, economic, or gender status, but because together we are sheep of the same pasture, cared for by the same Shepherd. Thirdly, we appreciate each other as each ministers to the other, and encourage one another in the multi-faceted roles assigned to each. We do not despise any service for the Lord, because we have come to recognize that every part is necessary for the body to function as God intends. Finally, we affirm the fact that all of God’s blessings are equally the possession of all of God’s children. He does not withhold blessing from one group (Jew / Gentile, slave / free, male / female) or relegate any one to an inferior status within His household. All are privileged to eat at His table, and all are therefore enjoined to receive each other in the spirit of equality. That various groups of people within the body of Messiah may serve in differing roles in no way negates this equality. In fact, it is in the proper functioning of each in his or her Spirit-led role that develops and maintains the unity of the body in the bonds of peace.

In our times, this verse (3:28) is disputed primarily in regard to two of the contrasts mentioned: Jew / Greek and male / female. Taken out of context, it is argued that Paul’s statement here has in all ways discarded the distinctions and there is therefore no difference in roles either. On the basis of this misunderstanding of Paul’s point here, it is taught that all ethnic distinctions have been abolished, as have gender roles within the body of Messiah. I have elsewhere written on the role of women in the body of Messiah,<sup>89</sup> in which I give the biblical case for the office of Overseer being restricted to males. In this same study, however, I show that the women within the community have a vital role, a role which has regrettably been diminished in the history of the Church. What, however, should we make of the claim that there is a distinct “calling” and “role” for the Jewish believer within the body of Messiah? Is this warranted? Do Jewish believers have a unique calling within the body of Messiah?

In a limited sense, I would answer in the affirmative. By this I mean that Jewish believers have an obligation to maintain their Jewish identity as long as this does not compromise their open and unabashed confession of Yeshua as the Messiah, and does not set up walls of separation from their non-Jewish brothers and sisters. For a believer in Yeshua to affirm that he has Jewish heritage is to affirm the faithfulness of God to His promise that He would never forsake Israel. This was Paul’s argument in Romans 9:23ff. That God has maintained a faithful remnant among the descendants of Jacob is proof that He is faithful to His word.

But then the same is true of non-Jews. That Gentiles would affirm their having been called out from the nations to join the *kehilah* of believers is likewise to extol the faithfulness of God, for He promised to bless the nations in Abraham’s Seed. So while it is important for believing Jews to maintain their

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<sup>89</sup> See my paper, “The Role of Women in the Messianic Fellowship,” available at [www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html](http://www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html).

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Jewish identity, it is equally important for non-Jews to affirm their membership within God's family as those chosen from the nations. It is in this way that God's faithfulness to both is seen, and one reason why Paul forbade Gentiles from attempting to gain Jewish status. If all in the body of Messiah are reckoned as Jews, then God is the God of the Jews only, which is a falsehood (Rom 3:29f). God's purpose for the body of Messiah is that Jew and non-Jew confess a single faith, living out that life of faith according to a single standard (the Torah), and that therefore Yeshua is seen to be the Shepherd of one flock. In this way, the promise to Abraham is witnessed as being fulfilled in our world.

But the teaching that there is a calling for the believing Jew beyond this I do not affirm. First, the word "calling" is used by Paul, not of some special role or ministry, but of the life of holiness which all the saved community should exemplify.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. (1Cor 1:26–29)

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Gal 5:13)

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints... (Eph 1:18)

Let the peace of Messiah rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col 3:15)

The "calling" of God in Pauline literature speaks of salvation in general (cf. Rom 8:28f) and holy living in particular. This is the calling of all, regardless of lineage or ethnic association. To use Paul's Olive Tree metaphor, all of the branches, whether natural or grafted in, bear the same fruit because all are attached to the riches of the same root. This is our calling, whether Jew or non-Jew. It is wrong, therefore, to teach that Jews have certain privileges in the body of Messiah which the non-Jew must forfeit (such as affirming one's vital connection to Abraham as one's father, cf. Rom 4; participating in the covenant signs; living out a complete and full Torah lifestyle; rejoicing in the Sabbath and Festivals, etc.). Those who have joined themselves to the Lord by being grafted into the covenant of Israel have the same privileges and responsibilities as the Jewish believer. Together they are a light to the nations; together they serve the Almighty; together they rejoice in the blessings of the covenant and the hope that they may pass to the next generation the glory of witnessing to a watching world that God is faithful to His ancient promises. To argue differently is to fly in the face of Paul's clear teaching, and to go contrary to the promises in Messiah foretold by the prophets.

It is this very point Paul makes in the conclusion of v. 28: "for you are all

one in Messiah Yeshua.” It is in the face of diversity (Jew/Gentile; slave/free; male/female) that unity is possible. While maintaining our distinct ethnicity, economic status, and gender, we nonetheless affirm our full and complete equality in the Messiah: One Master (and thus one set of *halachot*); One faith (and thus one Divine revelation [Bible] for all); One *mikveh* (and thus one primary and overarching identity for all). This is our calling, and together we serve each other to fulfill it.<sup>90</sup>

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## 29 And if you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.

Like the former verse, in which the word order emphasized the sense of “all” (πᾶς, *pas* being put first in the sentence), so here Paul brings the larger argument (that one’s status in the world does not afford him a place in God’s grace) to bear upon the specific case at hand by emphasizing “you” (ὑμεῖς, *humeis*), putting it at the beginning of the clause. If status in this world has no affect upon one’s standing in grace, then this applies specifically to the Gentile believers in Galatia: they stand in the blessings of God, the blessings promised to Abraham’s seed, because they participate in exactly the same faith that Abraham had. They do not come by this blessing through physical lineage, but through promise, the promise of God that He would bless the nations in Abraham’s Seed, that is, in Messiah. To be able to affirm that “Abraham is my father” (cf. Rom 4:16) is also to affirm that one is a *bona fide* covenant member with all of the privileges and responsibilities enjoined by the covenant.

But the key is in the “belonging: “if you belong to Messiah” (εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ, literally “and if you are Messiah’s”). Here is the primary identity. Not that one is first a descendant of Abraham and as a result belongs to Messiah, but rather that he is first “in Messiah” and as a result, a descendant of Abraham. This is Paul’s argument through and through. This is not to suggest that those who are physically descended from Abraham are not his descendants until they exercise faith in Yeshua, but it is to affirm that all true descendants of Abraham will participate in his faith, and this participation is the best proof of their connection to the patriarch. While Paul does not spend any time explaining this here like he does later in Romans 9-11, it may be affirmed that for Paul, the true descendants of Abraham are known for participation in Abraham’s faith (3:7).

That the issue of calling Abraham one’s father was extant in the Mishnaic times is clear, and we may presume that at least the issue had been raised in Paul’s day. Note the following rabbinic halachah for proselytes:

These [people] bring [firstfruits] but do not recite: a proselyte brings but does not recite, because he is not able to say, “[I have come into the land] which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us,” (Deut 26:3). But if his mother was an Israelite, he brings and recites. And when he [the proselyte] prays in private, he says, “God of the fathers [instead of “God of our fathers”]. And when he prays in the synagogue, he says, “God of

<sup>90</sup> It is a great misfortune that some within the Messianic movement have begun teaching what they call the “Divine Invitation” doctrine. In this errant theology, it is taught that Jews are obligated to the whole Torah, while Gentiles are divinely “invited” to keep the Torah. For an assessment of this teaching and refutation of it, see my essay, “An Assessment of the ‘Divine Invitation’ Teaching,” available at [www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html](http://www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html). See also the Excursus, pp. 215ff.

your fathers.” [But] if his mother was an Israelite, he says, “God of our fathers.”<sup>91</sup>

If indeed this issue was surfacing in Paul’s day, we know what side he took.<sup>92</sup> From Paul’s perspective, to tell Gentile believers within the body of Messiah that they cannot claim Abraham as their father, is to deny their status within the covenant, and thus to deny the viability of their faith.

Note carefully that Paul does not say that they are physical descendants from Abraham, but that they are “heirs according to promise.” For Paul, the word “promise” encapsulates the idea of faith, for it was in regard to the promise that Abraham believed and it was counted to him for righteousness. The concept of “promise” in Paul is centered upon the Promised One, and faith in His work of salvation. Thus, “heirs according to promise” means “heirs by faith in the Promised One.” Even as Isaac was the promised son who came by divine fiat, so the sonship of the Gentile believers came about, not by means of the “flesh” (i.e., by ethnic status) but through the sovereign work of grace infused within them by the Spirit, granting repentance and faith.

So Paul is not teaching a “replacement theology” here, whereby those of faith are the true descendants of Abraham to the exclusion of the physical descendants of the patriarchs. That whole issue, of how God will sovereignly bring the physical descendants to faith, is not dealt with here (Paul explains this in Romans). Rather, Paul is dealing with how the Gentiles figure into the covenant and the promise of God—by being the recipients of the promise given to Abraham. He concludes that their faith has made them heirs of Abraham and thus partakers in the covenant made with him.

But as Abraham’s heirs, what has been bequeathed to the Gentiles believers? If we can be allowed to include Paul’s teaching to the Romans, then we know that the answer is this: the Gentile believers have become heirs of all of the richness of the root that nourishes the tree into which they have been grafted! The Torah, with its wisdom and safeguards for life and community; the Sabbath, with its joy and focused perspective on God’s faithfulness and love; the Festivals, with their revelation of God’s salvation, and the promise of His dwelling among His people; the Prophets, and their call to a humble life of faith; and finally and ultimately, Yeshua, our Messiah, Who loved us and gave Himself for us. This is the heritage of all who call Abraham their father.

In a time when the Christian Church appears to have lost her way, often being hardly distinguishable from the world, nothing is more vital than to reclaim our heritage as Abraham’s descendants, and to retrieve the covenant blessings that have been lost. For Paul, a vital connection to Abraham was far greater than theoretical theology: it grounded the believer in a firm identity that is seen in the everyday life of faith. What is more, if we are able to recognize who we are in Messiah, and then to see ourselves as sons and

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91 m.*Bikkurim* 1:4.

92 Interestingly, Rambam sides with Paul on this one, teaching that anyone who does the commandments is a part of Israel and may refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as “our fathers.” See the comments of Blackwell, *Mishnaot* 6 vols (Judaica Press, 1983), 1.469. Rambam’s teaching, that proselytes are one and the same with the native born Jew, may be found in *Letter to Obadiah the Proselyte*. See Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (Behrman House, 1972), pp. 475–76.

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daughters of Abraham, we will have the ability to pass on to the next generation a sense of belonging that our generation has essentially missed.

This is not an easy task! We have centuries and even millennia of contrary and errant theology from which we must “unwrap” ourselves. We must retool our thinking, and work diligently to realign our outlook: our true identity will require shedding the false one we may have carried. Even as the Galatian believers were being called upon by Paul to forego the prevailing view (that becoming a proselyte was necessary for them to be full-fledge covenant members), so we must be willing to scrutinize what we have been taught, judging it against the straight-edge of the Scriptures. When we do, we will recognize our identity as “heirs according to promise” and live accordingly.