

RETHINKING THE FEMALE STATUS/FUNCTION QUESTION: THE JEW/GENTILE RELATIONSHIP AS PARADIGM

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The different positions regarding the role of women in the Church can, according to Hoch,¹ be categorized into three distinct groups: the nonevangelical egalitarian approach, the evangelical egalitarian approach, and the hierarchicalist approach. Other terms are used in the literature (traditionalist, Biblical feminist), but Hoch's three are as good as any and are less pejorative. It is important to maintain our civility in the debate, even in terms of the labels we use to characterize each other's positions.

A basic tenet of the hierarchicalists' view regarding the role of women in the Church is that a distinction must be maintained between one's status or position soteriologically and one's function or role sociologically. They insist that equality in the spiritual realm does not require or demand equality in the social/ministry realm. Hoch summarizes the hierarchicalist view: "Hierarchicalists firmly reject the thesis that Gal 3:28 teaches complete functional equality between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and masters, or male and female. They believe that Paul is affirming soteriological equality."² Although Hoch does not cite any examples of those in the hierarchicalist camp who hold such a view, several espouse this position.³ Evangelical egalitarians would argue that there is some correlation between one's status in the body of Christ and one's function or role in the smaller society of the Church and consequently the larger society of the culture.⁴

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¹ C. B. Hoch, Jr., "The Role of Women in the Church: A Survey of Current Approaches," *Grace Theological Journal* 8/2 (1987) 241-251.

² *Ibid.* 248.

³ S. T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980); H. W. House, "Neither . . . Male nor Female . . . in Christ Jesus," *BSac* 145 (1988) 47-56; A. D. Litfin, "Evangelical Feminism: Why Traditionalists Reject It," *BSac* (1979) 258-271; G. W. Knight, III, "Male and Female Related He Them," *Christianity Today* (April 9, 1976) 13-17; J. J. Davis, "Some Reflections on Galatians 3:28, Sexual Roles, and Biblical Hermeneutics," *JETS* 19/3 (1976) 201-208; R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

⁴ K. Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966); R. Scroggs, "Woman in the NT," *IDBSup* 966-968; P. K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); V. Mollenkott, *Women, Men and the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977); L. Scanzoni and N. Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (rev. ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1986); J. K.

It is the question of the relationship between status and function that I would like to make the focus of this study. Which of these positions can we affirm from the text? Are we to agree with House that the apostle Paul in Gal 3:28 is only arguing for an equality of "position" but "not social equality between the pairs"?⁵ Or are we to side with Jewett that this passage is the "magna carta of humanity"?⁶ Another similar proposal is that of Stendahl:

The social and practical implications of the preceding statement about *Jew and Greek* could not be neutralized in the church by limiting them to man's relationship to God (*coram deo*). We would hardly expect to hear Paul say, "These statements apply to the question of individual salvation, but in all other respects things are as they used to be." There can be no doubt that Paul did everything in his power to apply this principle in the actual life of his congregations.⁷

House,⁸ working from the Gal 3:28 passage, concluded that "equality in heirship" does not demand "equality in *role or function*." He observed that the emphasis in Gal 3:28 is "on unity in the one man, not social equality between the pairs." He later cites the hermeneutical principle of authorial intention as evidence that the issue of social roles "is totally foreign to the type of meaning or intention of the Apostle Paul."

Of course the determination of authorial intention is a complex exegetical procedure. Kaiser⁹ reminds us that no one has yet devised a workable and defensible method for determining with any finality the intention of an author of Scripture. He suggests that the place to begin is with a linguistic analysis of the author's writings. Included in this analysis would be the author's use of cultural terms, tropes and figurative terms, immediate and parallel contexts, and key theological terms. Hirsch, in his profound and significant work on obtaining validity in the interpretation of written documents, argued that "verbal meaning is whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs."¹⁰

It seems reasonable to assume that until this kind of verbal analysis to determine Paul's meaning has been done, one must refuse the temptation to announce that an author's intention has been discovered. The kind of exegetical detail needed to support one's contention of authorial intended meaning was unfortunately lacking from House's presentation (and from the others cited with him who hold his views). Therefore the question of

Howard, "Neither Male nor Female: An Examination of the Status of Women in the New Testament," *EvQ* 55/1 (1983) 31-42; J. A. Grassi, *The Teacher in the Primitive Church and the Teacher Today* (Santa Clara: University of Santa Clara, 1973); E. S. Fiorenza, "Toward a Feminist Biblical Hermeneutic: Biblical Interpretation and Liberation Theology," in *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics* (ed. D. K. McKim; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

⁵ House, "Neither" 54.

⁶ Jewett, *Man* 142.

⁷ Stendahl, *The Bible* 32-33 (italics his).

⁸ House, "Neither" 54 (italics his).

⁹ W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).

¹⁰ E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (London: Yale University, 1967).

whether Paul saw a relationship between status and function in the Church is still open and in need of further examination.

For the moment, the issue of whether the Gal 3:28 passage has any bearing on social equality in the culture or functional equality in the community of faith will be set aside. It is important to determine if Paul saw any relationship between spiritual status and spiritual function within the Church. To determine the answer to this question, the issue of Jew/Gentile relationships will be examined. After examining the linguistic and textual evidence, one should be able to make reasonable and textually grounded extrapolations to the other two pairs in the tripartite couplets of Gal 3:28 (bond/free; male/female) for which we have much less textual material (by comparison). In order to delimit the present analysis, attention will focus on Jew/Gentile relationships as expounded in Romans and Ephesians.¹¹ In particular, attention will be given to the significance of the *allelōn* reciprocal pronouns that follow each section on Jew/Gentile relations in these particular Pauline epistles, the discussion of the equal distribution of spiritual gifts to both groups, and in Ephesians the significance of the *syn*-compounds.

I. JEW/GENTILE RELATIONSHIPS IN ROMANS

Paul opens his letter by making his recipients aware of the fact that God has called¹² him to the task of calling a "people from among the Gentiles" (Rom 1:5). Paul defends this new mission by a linguistic device ("not only . . . but also") found frequently in the epistle (3:29; 4:9, 12b, 16b, 23-24; 9:24; 11:25-26). The redemptive plan of God is not only for Jews but also for Gentiles, and therefore Paul's mission has legitimacy. This is a "mystery" that had its theological origin in the Abrahamic covenant and its legalistic origin in the Mosaic covenant but has only now come to full expression in the Church. The Gentiles now also experience the "mercy" (11:30-32) of God.

The major sections that address the Jew/Gentile problem include chap. 4 and chaps. 9-11. In these passages Paul describes what place Gentiles now occupy in the plan of God. He argues that Gentile status in the body of Christ is the consummation of promises made to Abraham. The "no" of the Jews has become the "yes" of the Gentiles.¹³ The Jews have "stumbled" (11:11), and because of that "salvation has come to the Gentiles." God has not cast away the Jews, but he has grafted in the Gentiles (11:17-21).

¹¹ Debate over the authorship of Ephesians has led some like Goodspeed (*The Meaning of Ephesians* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1956]) and Mitton (*Ephesians* [NCB: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981]) to conclude, based primarily on linguistic and stylistic data, that the letter was not written by Paul. G. Barker (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible* [ed. M. C. Tenney; Grand Rapids: Zondervan], 2. 316-324) has mounted convincing internal evidence that refutes these conclusions. K. Barth, *Israel and the Church* (John Knox, 1969), after examining the work of Percy (as cited on p. 408) is convinced of the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and concludes that "its message clearly speaks for Pauline authorship" (p. 78).

¹² See Stendahl, *The Bible* 7-23.

¹³ *Ibid.* 5.

Murray has properly seen the relationship between chaps. 9-11 (but unfortunately not between chaps. 12-16) and chaps. 1-8:

It might seem that there is discontinuity in this portion of the epistle. . . . It is only as we fail to discern or overlook the relation that these chapters sustain to the thesis of this epistle that any thought of irrelevance or discontinuity is entertained. . . . These chapters delineate for us the *worldwide design of God in reference to Jew and Gentile*.¹⁴

As Cranfield¹⁵ notes, Paul in chaps. 9-11 wishes to discuss the relationship of God's mercy to his past dealings with Israel and his present dealings with Gentiles in the Church. As part of his argument Paul observes that even in the history of Israel God has been selective with the bestowal of his mercy and that "not all who are of Israel are Israel" (Rom 9:6b). He uses the examples of Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and the freedom that God exercised in the exodus event to harden the heart of Pharaoh. He argues that God has the freedom to "have mercy on whom I have mercy" (v. 15). God has even prepared "vessels of mercy" (v. 23a) "whom he has called, even us, not only from among the Jews but also from among the Gentiles" (v. 24).

In 11:11-24 Paul goes on to describe the inclusion of Gentiles into God's redemptive community by means of an analogy with the grafting process from horticulture. The Gentiles have their present status as a result of the mercy of God displayed by his willingness to so work that one cannot observe any difference between the "natural" branches and those that have been "grafted in" (11:17-18). The grafting process has resulted in believing Gentiles becoming "partakers" (*synkoinōnos*) with the Jews. Hoch has identified the "plethora of views"¹⁶ that have been postulated concerning the identification of the olive tree. He advances convincing arguments for taking the olive tree to be the Abrahamic covenant here referred to metaphorically but in Galatians 3 referred to propositionally as the source of blessing both to Jews and to Gentiles.

II. THE ARGUMENT FOR SOCIAL EQUALITY FROM THE *ALLĒLŌN* RECIPROCAL PRONOUN

Most commentators¹⁷ recognize a break at chap. 12 when Paul begins to deal with the consequences or implications of the gospel. This break is

¹⁴ J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968; italics mine).

¹⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1979).

¹⁶ C. B. Hoch, Jr., "The Significance of the *syn*-Compounds for Jew-Gentile Relationships in the Body of Christ," *JETS* 25/2 (1982) 175-183. The following views regarding the identity of the olive tree in Romans 11 have been identified by Hoch: (1) Israel (Nygren, 1949); (2) true Israel (Allis, 1964); (3) the Israel of God (Johnston, 1943); (4) the true people of God (Flew, 1943); (5) God's chosen people (Kugelman, 1955); (6) the continuing permanent covenant community (Pieters, 1950); (7) the body of those in whom the grace of Christ has been truly operative (Ellison, 1966); (8) the Church in history (Packer, 1962); (9) the mystical body of Christ (Bourke, 1947); (10) the place of privilege (Ryrie, 1959); (11) the Abrahamic covenant (Younce, 1963).

¹⁷ Cf. Murray, *Epistle* 109-110; J. Calvin, *Commentary*; Cranfield, *Commentary* 592-593; E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 323-325.

made evident by the presence of the reciprocal pronoun *allelōn*, which appears first at 12:5 and then frequently throughout the remaining chapters of the book (12:10, 16; 13:8; 14:13, 19; 15:5, 7, 14; 16:16). Getz¹⁸ has developed the Church life implications of the admonitions found not only in Paul but other writers as well. He may not have given serious attention, however, to the contextual dynamics of the occurrences of the term. This has resulted in an attenuated application of the admonitions to only interpersonal relationships between Gentile believers in specific local churches.

Beginning in chap. 12 the apostle addresses the practical ways in which the theological truth regarding status or position of Gentiles in the Church works its way into the very fabric of the new community. The former enemies are now "members one of another" (12:5) and must consequently behave as though this is true. What is often overlooked in most exegesis on Romans 12-16 is that Paul is simply extending his theological argument about Jew/Gentile relationships in Christ to Jew/Gentile relationships in the Church. Beginning in 12:5 Paul offers a litany of exhortations using the *allelōn* pronoun. In 12:10 we as Jew and Gentile are to "be devoted to one another in brotherly love" and to "give preference to one another." In 12:16 we are to "be of the same mind toward one another." Chapter 14 begins with an admonition to "accept the one weak in faith" (14:1). Neither group is to "judge one another" (14:13) but instead is to "pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another" (14:16). Both groups are to "accept one another" (15:7) just as Christ has accepted both groups into his fellowship.

Many commentators have failed to allow the immediate context of chaps. 9-11 to inform their understanding of the nature of the admonitions and exhortations beginning in chap. 12. Some, like Cranfield, Käsemann and Murray, regard the admonitions as general in nature rather than as particular admonitions to the two groups that have been the focus of Paul's remarks up to chap. 12. The inconsistency of their attitude toward this section can be seen in that all of them make the observation beginning in 14:1 and also in 15:7-13 that this section does have a decidedly Jew/Gentile flavor to its *Sitz im Leben*. For instance, Cranfield at 12:3-8 observes that the exhortations are "addressed to the members of the Christian community as recipients of various gifts." But later he notes that the exhortations in 14:1 ff. are related to the "division between weak and strong," which reflected a division "between Jewish and Gentile Christians." At 15:8-13 Cranfield admits that "there is an implicit appeal to the strong (many of them Gentile Christians) to receive and show considerateness to those weak brothers (most, if not all, of them Jewish Christians), according them special honour for the sake of their Kinsman, the Messiah of the Jews, who is the Gentiles' only true hope."

Still later in Cranfield's commentary (Essay I) he argues against those who see 9:1-11:36 "as a sort of excursus" and notes that his observations have been written from the perspective of "making it clear that 9:1-11:36 is

¹⁸ G. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1974); *Encouraging One Another* (Victor, 1984); *Building Up One Another* (Victor, 1984).

an essential element in the structure of Paul's attempted summary of the gospel." A similar pattern of inconsistency can be observed in Käsemann and Murray.

Many have not allowed context and language to influence their interpretation of these admonitions and in so doing have sanitized the specific appeal that Paul is making to two distinct groups within the Roman church. "One another" can be seen by us, standing at this point in Church history, as a reference to other believers with whom we must work and live in the Church. But this is a general application of the more specific admonition that Paul is making to Jewish and Gentile Christians within the believing community at Rome. Before we can make a general application of Biblical truth we must first allow the original force and meaning of the author's words to stand.¹⁹

Stendahl accurately perceives a general weakness in the typical interpretations made of Pauline literature. He writes that "the main lines of Pauline interpretation . . . have for many centuries been out of touch with one of the most basic of the questions and concerns that shaped Paul's thinking in the first place: the relation between Jews and Gentiles."²⁰ The weakness is evident in the theological methodology used to read and interpret Paul. We have often overlooked the historical fact that Paul wrestled with the great doctrines of justification, sanctification, adoption and others within the framework of Jew/Gentile relationships. Richardson observes: "The single most pressing issue in Paul's churches was the problem of the relationship of Jew and Greek. It was to this question he addressed himself most regularly, with numerous variations on a theme."²¹

Stendahl goes on to identify a particular weakness in the typical interpretations made of Paul's epistle to the Romans when he says:

The lost centrality of "Jews and Gentiles" is most clearly to be felt in a study of Romans. What is Romans about? Why did Paul write this letter at that crucial point in his career? . . . Paul's focus really is the relation between Jews and Gentiles, not the notions of justification or predestination.²²

Gaston argues similarly: "In any case the theme of Romans could be characterized as something like the universality of sin and salvation, but seen, I believe, from the perspective of the inclusion of the previously excluded [Gentiles]."²³

What the apostle does in the latter half of Romans (chaps. 12-16) is to spell out in specific admonitions how the theological truth of the Gentiles' new status is to be operationalized in the Church. The pronoun *allelon* suggests that Paul intends his reader to understand that the relationship is now egalitarian and reciprocal, not hierarchical (with Jews on top and Gentiles on the bottom). It is to prevent such theological superiority that

¹⁹ Cranfield, *Commentary* 611-616.

²⁰ K. Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 1.

²¹ P. Richardson, *Paul's Ethic of Freedom* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979) 16-17.

²² Stendahl, *Paul* 3-4.

²³ L. Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1987) 116.

Paul admonishes his Jewish readers "not to think more highly" (12:3) of themselves than they should, not to be "haughty in mind" nor "wise in your own estimation" (12:16).

The problem between Jewish and Gentile Christians was not onesided (as is true of most relationships). This is made evident by Paul's remarks to the "strong" in 14:1 ff. Most commentators agree that the "weak" and the "strong" represent Jews and Gentiles respectively, although the issue is not without problems.²⁴ Minear for instance insists that "one can be quite confident, therefore, that in this whole section of the epistle [1:18-4:25] the author was speaking directly to the Jewish spokesmen of the weak in faith and that these paragraphs give a polemical portrait of their position."²⁵ Further, Minear sees the entire thrust of the epistle as reflecting a "primary concern with pastoral problems" with a church that is divided between Jews and Gentiles, both with "sharp mutual suspicions."

The Gentile Christians could be as condescending and contemptible of Jewish believers as the Jewish Christians were of Gentile believers.²⁶ Therefore Paul admonishes them to "accept the one who is weak in faith" (14:1) and to avoid the tendency to pass spiritual judgment (14:10, 13). The preferred attitude between the groups is expressed in 14:19: "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another."

The apostle concludes his admonitions to both groups in 16:16-17 by urging them to "greet one another with a holy kiss" and for both groups to "keep your eye on those who cause dissensions." It is obvious that Paul wished to see the two contrary groups manifest in social and ethical practice what was true about their relationship theologically. Love manifested in mutuality and reciprocity was to be the hallmark of the Christian community in Rome because of what Jesus had done (16:25-27).

III. THE ARGUMENT FOR FUNCTIONAL EQUALITY FROM SPIRITUAL GIFTS

At the beginning of Paul's break at Romans 12 he makes an almost immediate appeal to the subject of spiritual gifts (12:3-8). He admonishes both groups (Jews and Gentiles) to maintain "sober judgment" in regard to estimations of importance. The apostle will help them achieve this state by informing them that "not all [members] have the same function" and that

²⁴ The identification of the "weak" and "strong" in Romans is usually distinguished from the same terms as used in 1 Corinthians and from the groups represented in Colossians and Galatians.

²⁵ P. Minear, *The Obedience of Faith* (London/Naperville: SCM/Allenson, 1971) 47.

²⁶ In fact J. D. Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), argues that Paul is here addressing an incipient anti-Semitism apparently prevalent in the Gentile world. It may have also been part of the mindset of Gentile Christians in the Roman church. Davies notes that "the attitude of Gentile Christians toward Jewish Christians in Rome and elsewhere should not be separated from this larger Greco-Roman anti-Judaism. . . . Many . . . would find it easy to carry over into the Church the contempt that their neighbors felt for Jews" (p. 158).

“each member belongs to all the others.” The reason all do not have the same “function” is because “we have different gifts,” and these different gifts produce variety in function at the ministry level. Drane has set the question squarely as one confronts this parenetic section of the epistle: “Do these [exhortations] have the form of a general paraenesis, or are they aimed at some specific circumstances in the Roman church?”²⁷ Although I may disagree with his conclusions, he at least has faced the issue as it develops from the text. For instance, I disagree with his argument that “the burden of proof lies squarely with those who would argue that Romans is concerned with specific circumstances in the Roman church.”

It seems more logical to assume that the burden of proof must lie with those who would ignore or disregard the first eleven chapters of the book. The evidence is quite overwhelming for positing some kind of friction between Jewish and Gentile groups, although one might not want to go quite so far as Minear²⁸ has done. We may not be able to identify with any accuracy the exact identity of the groups in question, but we certainly know from the text (and from extra-Biblical evidence)²⁹ that the question of the Gentile place in the apostolic mission had been raised and that Paul needed to address it (1:5, 13; 2:14; 3:29; 4:16; 9:24, 30; 11:11-13).

Commenting on the significance of the *oun* with which Paul begins this section Cranfield says that

apart from the linguistic consideration, it would seem intrinsically more probable that Paul thought of his exhortation as being based upon the whole of what he had so far written to the Roman Church than as based solely on chapters 9-11. We take it, therefore, that the reference of *oun* is to the whole course of the epistle's argument up to this point.³⁰

He goes on to note that the force of the *parakalō* is not to be found in translations like “beseech” or “comfort” or, as with the NEB, “implore.” The preferred translation is “exhort” with the sense that Paul is “claiming in Christ's name an obedience which his readers are under obligation to render.”

Although Cranfield has all of these pieces to the puzzle, he fails to see that they are connected explicitly to the Jew/Gentile issue that is at the heart of Paul's “thesis” in chaps. 1-11 (and especially chaps. 9-11). He apparently sees no relationship between the admonitions in the spiritual gifts section and the previous elaboration of Gentile status in the new eschatological community of faith.

Cranfield does note that the gifts are “given for the fulfillment of different functions” but that these differences in function do not impinge upon “equal dignity” since all in the Church have experienced the “same judgment and mercy.” The force of his argument could have been enhanced by

²⁷ D. W. Drane, *Paul: Libertine or Legalist? A Study in the Theology of the Major Pauline Epistles* (London: SPCK, 1975) 220.

²⁸ Minear, *Obedience*.

²⁹ Drane, *Paul*.

³⁰ Cranfield, *Commentary* 596.

explicit reference to the historical context in which the words were written—namely, the issue of Gentile status in the Church.

Käsemann also recognizes that 12:3-21 deals with “Christian responsibility . . . from the standpoint of accentuated community functions . . . in relation to brothers and opponents.”³¹ He does not identify the “opponents” but at least does see some relationship between the distribution of spiritual gifts and the debate over Gentile status *vis-à-vis* the Jews as the people of God. He also notes at 14:1-15:13 that “problems [within the church] are solved in terms of the catchword of mutual acceptance on a christological foundation.” Again, like Cranfield, he fails to connect the subject of spiritual gifts (and function within the believing community) and the admonitions to mutual acceptance to the larger problem of the relationship of Jews and Gentiles that had been the focus of the previous sections of the epistle. Barrett, however, sees at 12:3-21 that Paul’s admonitions are directed toward “one group of Christians [who] may think themselves superior to others—as, for example, Gentile to Jewish Christians (cf. xi.18ff.).”³²

Paul prefaces his comments about spiritual gifts with an admonition directed to both Jews and Gentiles (“I say to every one of you”) regarding a proper estimation of one’s value and status within the community. The equilibrating factor among them is their equal status before God (11:11-12) and the equal distribution of spiritual gifts, which are bestowed “according to the grace given us” (12:6). The metaphor of the Church as a “body” with “many members” and the fact that each of these members “belongs to all the others” makes Paul’s point to both groups.

The variety of gifts produces variety in function (“not all have the same function,” 12:4). But the ministry functions (which make manifest the gift that is supernatural and unseen) are open to all without any restrictions. The obvious emphasis in 12:6-8 is that whatever one’s gift, he is to perform the ministry function that the gift enables him to do (“if serving, let him serve; . . . if teaching, let him teach,” 12:7).

In summary, what is true of Gentiles at the level of soteriology (status) is operationalized at the ministry level (function). Simply to have in theory the privileges of equal status without the accompanying experiencing of that equal status would seem to have been insufficient from Paul’s perspective.

IV. JEW/GENTILE RELATIONSHIPS IN EPHESIANS

The book of Ephesians gives us Paul’s most extended treatment and explication of the Jew/Gentile relationship and has been described as Paul’s most profound work after Romans.³³ Paul begins the letter with a *bērākā* praising God for his grace and for his wisdom, which has been

³¹ Käsemann, *Commentary* 323.

³² C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper, 1957) 235.

³³ M. Barth, *Ephesians* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974).

manifested in the *mystērion* (Eph 1:9; 3:3). It is through the work of Christ in the outworking of this "mystery" that Gentiles have "obtained an inheritance" (1:11) and have received the Holy Spirit as a pledge of that inheritance (1:14) so that they can experience the full glory that the inheritance will one day bring (1:18).

In chap. 2 Paul highlights the present status of Gentiles by reference to their past condition (2:1-3, 11-12). Previously Gentiles could be described as "dead in trespasses and sins" (2:1), "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel" (2:12), "strangers to the covenants of promise" (2:12), "having no hope and without God in the world" (2:12), "strangers and aliens" (2:19).

The prior status of Gentiles has been reversed through the work of Christ (2:4-10, 13-22), who has made it possible for them to be "brought near" (2:13), made "fellow-citizens" (2:19) and "fellow-heirs" (3:6), "fellow-members of the body" (3:6) and "fellow-partakers of the promise" (3:6). Both groups (Jews and Gentiles) can now experience "the one new man" (2:15), "reconciliation" (2:16), "peace" (2:17), "access in one Spirit to the Father" (2:18), "being fitted together" (2:21), "being built together into a dwelling of God" (2:22).

V. THE ARGUMENT FOR THEOLOGICAL EQUALITY FROM THE SYN-COMPOUNDS

The force of Paul's teaching in Ephesians is emphasized through the creation of new terminology to describe what Christ has done. Hoch³⁴ and Robinson³⁵ have observed that Paul cannot find the descriptors already present in the language and so he "coins strange new words" (Robinson) by use of the *syn*-compound. M. Barth notes that Ephesians "is outstanding among the Pauline epistles because of the number of daring combinations of the Greek preposition *syn* with nouns and verbs."³⁶ The occurrence of this compound is more concentrated in Ephesians than in any of Paul's other letters. The prefix conveys the sense of equality and reciprocity between persons.³⁷ In fact, Harris³⁸ observes that *syn* expresses "intimate personal union." Barth recognizes that the *syn* "combinations all appear to refer to the oneness, the one new man, created by Christ out of Gentiles and Jews."³⁹

Some of the relevant *syn*-compounds in this section of Ephesians are found at 2:19 (*sympolitēs*), 2:21 (*synarmologeō*), 2:22 (*synoikodomeō*), 3:6 (*synklēronomos*), 3:6 (*symmetochos*), 3:6 (*synsōmos*). Each of these serves to make Paul's point regarding the fact that Jews and Gentiles, formerly alienated and antagonistic toward each other, have experienced *šālôm*

³⁴ Hoch, "Significance."

³⁵ J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1952).

³⁶ Barth, *Israel* 92.

³⁷ W. Grundmann, *TDNT*, 7. 770.

³⁸ M. J. Harris, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* 1206-1207.

³⁹ Barth, *Israel* 92.

(*eirēnē*, 2:14, 15, 17; 4:3). The peace manifests itself by the new status that Gentiles now experience “through the blood of Christ” (2:13), “through the cross” (2:16), “through him” (2:18). The peace made possible through Christ creates a “bond of peace” between the two groups that both of them have a responsibility to maintain (4:3).

The *syn*-compound is important in Ephesians because it highlights philologically the point that Paul wishes to make theologically and practically. The relationship between Jew and Gentile is best described as an equality of status/position within the “new man” that has been created in Christ. The previous “dividing wall”⁴⁰ that separated Jew from Gentile has been broken down so that God could fashion the “two into one new man, establishing peace” (2:15). Again we find in Paul a desire not to obliterate the historical significance of Israel and the covenant with its attendant promises. Rather, there is an appreciation for and building upon that previous relationship, the result being the formation of a new “temple” (2:21) and “dwelling of God” and what Paul will prefer to call “the whole body” (4:16) or “the body of Christ” (4:12). The new entity created by God in Christ brings both together on an equal footing so that both share equally in the “gifts” (4:8-9) that are bestowed by the victorious and ascended Christ. In 4:16 we encounter two more *syn*- compounds (*synarmologeō*; *synbibazō*), which finish off Paul’s argument forcefully. Paul describes in this verse a body made up of Jews and Gentiles who are “joined and held together” with the bond of love as each part of the body does its part to contribute to its overall welfare.

VI. THE ARGUMENT FOR SOCIAL EQUALITY FROM THE *ALLELŌN* COMMANDS

Following this extended theological discussion the apostle wrestles with the ramifications of the new status of Gentiles in relation to Israel. He calls for both groups to “walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (4:1) and to show “humility and gentleness, . . . patience, . . . and forbearance to one another in love” (4:2). Paul recalls his earlier comments about the “peace” created between the two groups through the cross of Christ and calls both groups to “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (note the repetition in vv. 4-5 of “one” and “all”). These repetitions are intended to make clear Paul’s message that the world of “two” has become the world of “one” as a result of the work of Christ.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The “dividing wall” or “middle wall of partition” (Eph 2:14) has been variously interpreted. Barth (*Ephesians*) identifies the different views that have been offered as to the precise meaning of *mesotoichon*: (1) the barrier mentioned by Josephus that separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner sanctuary; (2) the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies; (3) the fence or hedge built around the law so as to prevent the pious Jew from purposely or accidentally breaking it; (4) the flesh, which is at enmity with God; (5) a cosmic barrier symbolized in the Jewish law. W. Hendricksen (*Ephesians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967] 133-134) argues that the “barrier” is the law itself, which separated the Gentiles from the Jews and created hostility and animosity between them.

⁴¹ Cf. Hendricksen, *Ephesians* 185.

Later in this chapter Paul calls for both groups to “speak truthfully” (4:25) to each other. The reason for this ethical behavior is the fact that both groups are now “members of one body.” There is an admonition regarding thoughtless and careless words (4:29), which might tend to create divisions between the groups. Instead of those inflammatory behaviors, which are potentially divisive, the apostle admonishes both groups to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other” (4:32). He concludes by asking both groups to “speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (5:19) and simply to “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (5:21).

Again we find the *allēlōn* reciprocal pronoun following the theological treatment of Jew/Gentile relationships. The imperatival form of the verb linked with the pronoun acts as a call to functionalize the theological truth in concrete relationships and behaviors. Paul apparently expects that the new status of the Gentiles will result in differences being felt and experienced at the social/interpersonal levels within the believing community. Gentiles are not to be treated by Jews as they had been in the past. Something radical and revolutionary had happened to old ways of relating as a result of the work of Christ. The objective reality of salvation in Christ was to have a significant impact on social status and function. Things were not to remain the same. A new day had dawned. This new way of relating is so radical a departure from the patterns of behavior associated with rabbinic Judaism (“Lord, I thank you that you have not made me a barbarian, a slave, or a woman”) that Paul views what Christ has done as creating cosmic shockwaves (1:10, 19-23; 3:6-7; 4:10).

Barth’s insightful analysis of Ephesians is so pertinent to the discussion at this point that he will be quoted at length:

When in Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul speaks of the oneness in Christ which supersedes national, social, cultural, racial distinctions, he always begins his enumeration of the previously inimical camps with reference to “Jew and Greek” or “Jews and Greeks”. . . . In Romans 12 and thereafter, ethical questions are treated only after (in chapters 9-11) the relation between the church and Israel is extensively discussed. . . . Similarly, in Ephesians the ethical appeals concerning peace and love among God’s children follow upon the description of that peace which God in his love and his beloved son created between the Gentiles and Israel.⁴²

VII. THE ARGUMENT FOR FUNCTIONAL EQUALITY FROM SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The general admonitions to both groups are followed (Eph 4:7-16) by specific explanations about the functions both groups are privileged to enjoy as a result of the work of Christ. Divine endowment in the form of spiritual gifts (*charis; doma*) has been given “to each one of us” (4:7) in

⁴² Barth, *Israel* 92-93.

order to "prepare God's people for works of service" (4:12). The various "works of service" or functional capacities further serve a penultimate end, which is "that the body of Christ may be built up until we all (Jew and Gentile) reach unity in the faith . . . and become mature" (4:12-13).

Paul opens the fourth chapter using the same term (*parakalō oun*) found in Rom 12:1 where he leaves theological matters and moves to the implicational and applicational consequences of Jew/Gentile relationships. He then enumerates a sevenfold confession highlighting those beliefs that now unite both Jew and Gentile in a common faith (Eph 4:4-6). Bruce makes the observation at 4:5 that "Jewish and Gentile believers alike acknowledged one Lord, shared one faith in Him, and had undergone one baptism into His name."⁴³ In several other references to this section of chap. 4 Bruce goes on to note that Paul is extending his discussion from chaps. 1-3 about the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.

Beginning at 4:7 Paul introduces the subject of spiritual gifts. Bruce correctly observes: "The grace which each believer has received for the discharge of his particular function in the community is proportionate to the gift which he has freely received from his glorified Lord." Thus the subject in this section of the epistle, as it pertains to spiritual gifts, stresses the more functional implications of the Gentiles' status previously (chaps. 1-3) discussed.

Gentiles receive the same gifts as Jews and therefore are coparticipants in the enterprise of "building up the body of Christ" (4:12). They are therefore eligible to function in the roles of "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers" (4:11). Barth argues that the discussion of spiritual gifts at this point in the epistle is intended to stress the truth that "Christ wants, trusts, and equips all members of God's people to be active servants. Therefore, they are all given a priestly function."⁴⁴ This would obviously include Gentiles who now enjoy full status within the believing community. They too are qualified to minister as "priests unto God," and their union card is the spiritual gift(s) bestowed on them by a victorious Christ.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The paradigm of the Jew/Gentile relationship seems to suggest that the objective theological status now obtained in Christ (we have not explored the theological significance of the *en Christō* formula) does impact functional and social dimensions of existence for Gentiles within the body of Christ.

In Romans we find Paul building his theological case for the spiritual equality of Gentiles. Following that argument, in chap. 12 he begins to identify the practical implications of this new (in a qualified sense) status for Gentiles. He does this by an appeal to the spiritual giftedness of both.

⁴³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Westwood: Fleming Revell, 1961) 80.

⁴⁴ Barth, *Ephesians* 482.

This section (Rom 12:3-8) begins with a call to keep a "sober judgment" about themselves. God has distributed gifts to all "members," and these various gifts produce a variety of "functions" (12:4). Paul identifies the gifts in vv. 5-8 as those who function as prophets, servants, teachers, encouragers (like Barnabas), givers, leaders, and doers of mercy. Paul does not qualify or restrict in any way the functions that Gentiles can perform within the community. They apparently have as much freedom to minister as do Jews.

In Ephesians we see the same pattern emerge. After Paul's majestic theological orchestration in chaps. 1-3, where he argues for the equality of Gentile status in the Church, he again moves to the practical significance of this new status at the functional and social levels beginning in chap. 4. Just like he did in Romans, Paul follows his theological explanation with a reference to the subject of spiritual giftedness. Again he wishes to stress the equality of the distribution ("But to each one of us . . ."). The equality of distribution is matched by an equality in function that those various gifts represent ("It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers"). The intended result of this multifaceted ministry, engaged in without restriction by Jews and Gentiles, was a "body" built up and united in "the faith and knowledge of the Son of God"—in other words, a united community reflecting corporately "the measure of the fullness of Christ."

In both Romans and Ephesians the *allelōn* reciprocal pronoun does not appear until the second half of the epistle. In Romans the first occurrence in reference to believers is found at 12:5, and the pronoun is found in every chapter until the last occurrence in 16:16. In Ephesians the first occurrence of the pronoun is found at 4:2. The same pattern can be found in 1 Corinthians where, with the exception of 7:5 in reference to married persons, the term is first found at 11:33. In Galatians the term first appears in 5:13, in Colossians at 3:9, and in 1 Thessalonians at 3:12. This pattern is too frequent and deliberate to be just coincidence. It seems that Paul has a predisposition for this term as the standard word to express at the concrete social level the theological truth of Jew/Gentile equality in Christ.

The question that emerges from this study of Jew/Gentile relationships and the issue of status versus function is this: To what extent can we build a model of male/female relationships on that of the Jew/Gentile relationship? As Stendahl and others have made clear, the primary concern in the Pauline communities revolved around the issue of Gentile status. Paul, however, apparently saw some relationship between the issue of Gentile and female status or otherwise his statement in Gal 3:28 does not make any sense. In passing, it might be instructive to note that Paul makes a linguistic connection between Jew/Gentile and male/female relationships through his use of *mysterion* (see Rom 11:25; 16:25; Eph 3:3-7; Col 1:26-27; cf. Eph 5:32). If Paul could argue that Gentiles who were once excluded now have full status and freedom to function within the Church, then he could also have argued the same for women who stood in similar socio-cultural positions.

Many would argue that the male/female relationship has been ordained by creation and should not be tampered with. The argument then shifts to a discussion of the nature of the relationship between males and females in the Garden before the fall. Hierarchalists see functional differences at creation and before the fall. Egalitarians argue that the creation accounts depict the ideal male/female relationship of equality and reciprocity. What the Church is being called to affirm are the redemptive relationships of the new creation in Christ Jesus, which is a reversal of patterns established as a result of the fall and the insidious infection of sin into relationships at all levels of human existence.⁴⁵

We must always keep in mind when reading Paul that he lives in a world of tension between the real world and the ideal of the new creation that he and the rest of the Church are called to bring into existence through the "ministry of reconciliation" and "the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:17-21). The old way of relating as male and female, although sanctioned by culture and often by religion, was not to be the standard for the Church. We are being called to the creation of new relationships that find their power to effect change in the work of the risen Christ. In Gal 3:28 Paul sees the creation of a new epoch wherein man and woman, Jew and Gentile, slave and free will no longer be shackled by the debilitating constraints of sin but will experience redemptive renewal. The operative phrase in the verse is *en Christo*. Our new relationship to Jesus impacts all subsequent and derivative relationships and transforms them in the same way that our relationship to God has been transformed "in Christ."

Full participation of women in all ministry functions is the new creation ideal, which is constrained only by the realities of a hostile target culture that may as yet be unwilling to permit women such freedom. In such cases Paul was always willing to restrict his and others' freedoms and rights (1 Corinthians 9) for the larger interests of the gospel. The ironic situation today is that the Church now lags behind the culture (in the United States) in being willing to give to women what they have already been given in Christ.

Bilezikian has aptly stated: "The purpose of Christ's redemptive ministry was to redress the disruptions that had been brought about by the fall and to restore the integrity of God's creational purposes."⁴⁶ Richardson offers similar opinion when he writes in reference to Gal 3:28 "that in establishing his new creation motif Paul is attempting also to move back even behind Gen., ch. 2 . . . to a renewed understanding of the unity of mankind—male and female—presented in Gen. 1:26-27."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ F. A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1972) 94-101. Schaeffer discusses the concept of the "abnormal universe" in which because of the fall alienation has permeated human existence at all levels involving all relationships. See also J. Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 23-50, where he observes the same condition viewed more from a sociological and political perspective.

⁴⁶ G. Bilezikian, "Hierarchical and Egalitarian Inculturations," *JETS* 30/4 (1987) 422.

⁴⁷ Richardson, *Paul's Ethic* 77.

Why is it that Paul prefers to bring the discussion of male/female relationships back to Genesis 1-2 and original creation conditions (1 Cor 11:7-12; Gal 3:28; Eph 5:31-32; 1 Tim 2:13-14)? Apparently he sees in these accounts the ideal toward which the Church should be moving. The creation balance and equality between male and female (both created in God's image, both recipients of the mandate to subdue and rule over the earth) is replicated in Paul's advice on the sexual relationship of husband and wife (1 Cor 7:2-4), on the familial relationship of husband and wife (Eph 5:22-33), and on the responsibilities both have in the corporate worship of the Church (1 Tim 2:8-9).

Further study is needed to determine whether or to what extent one can extrapolate from the Jew/Gentile status/function question to the male/female status/function question. Does the presence of negative attitudes toward Gentiles in the text of the NT negate all of Paul's arguments to the contrary about their full and equal status? In the same way, one might come to argue that negative attitudes toward women, even expressed in the form of apostolic decree constrained by local culture, should not overthrow or cancel out new-creation ideals about female status and freedom to function within the Church. This should especially be evident given the pastoral constraints⁴⁸ under which Paul made many of his suggestions about the manner in which women could participate in the public meetings of the Church in a culture biased against such female participation.⁴⁹

Bruce reminds us that the divisions identified in Gal 3:28 originated from "cultural, social or domestic spheres" but that "no discrimination must be based on them 'in Christ Jesus'—that is, in the Christian fellowship."⁵⁰ He admits that Paul held consistently to this dictum "so far as the distinction between Jew and Gentile was concerned." He goes on to demonstrate that Paul's attitude toward the status of slaves is evident in his letter to Philemon in which he sends Onesimus back "not in the restoration of a slave to his master but the reconciliation of two temporarily estranged

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Cf. C. Kroeger, "The Apostle Paul and the Greco-Roman Cults of Women," *JETS* 30/1 (1987) 25-38; J. G. Sigountos and M. Shank, "Public Roles for Women in the Pauline Church: A Reappraisal of the Evidence," *JETS* 26/3 (1983) 283-295; *Not in God's Image* (ed. J. O'Faolain and L. Martines; New York: Harper, 1973). It is important to point out that when Paul makes his suggestions about the participation of women in the life and ministry of the Church he does so in restrained language. W. Liefeld, "Women and the Nature of Ministry," *JETS* 30/1 (1987) 49-61, Spencer, "Eve at Ephesus," *JETS* 17/4 (1974) 215-222, and Padgett, "Wealthy Women at Ephesus," *Int* (1987) 19-31, all observe that the force of Paul's language (*ouk epitrepō*) suggests a "temporary restriction on particular women" (Padgett, "Wealthy" 25) or "a personal practice" (Liefeld, "Women" 50), not a command or "his personal judgment . . . to restrain the women at Ephesus from teaching the men until they themselves were well instructed" (Spencer, "Eve" 219). The clear meaning of Paul's words may not be as clear as previously imagined. Also the historical situation in which Paul confronted potential heresy in Ephesus called for more drastic measures. Since the threat has been removed there is no longer a need for such measures to insure purity of doctrine.

⁵⁰ F. F. Bruce, "All Things to All Men: Diversity in Unity and Other Pauline Tensions," in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd* (ed. R. A. Guelich; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

fellow-Christians." In regard to the full functional status of women in the Pauline communities Bruce concludes that "the liberty accorded to Christian women to take such a responsible part in public worship [1 Cor 11:1-16] was a substantial step forward in the practical outworking of the principle that in Christ there is neither male nor female."

In any case, it continues to be the task of the Church to grapple with the larger issue of the role of women at the functional/ministry area in the Church. The importance of the problem is evident from the attention the topic is receiving from all quarters of Church life. This is healthy and good and hopefully will eventually pave the way for a clearer understanding of what the Bible means when it speaks to the issue of female participation in the life of the Church.