New Creation and Inheritance: Inclusion and Full Participation in Paul’s Letters to the Galatians and Romans

CAROLINE SCHLEIER CUTLER

A common theme in biblical narrative and prophetic literature is that God aligns with those whom Walter Brueggemann calls the "dispossessed, " that is, those denied land, denied power, denied place or voice in history.4 The dispossessed can also be defined as those who do not receive an inheritance, or who do not receive an inheritance unless someone else acts on their behalf. Thus, in an ironic twist, God ensures that it is the dispossessed who become the heirs, the meek who inherit the earth (cf. Matt 5:5).

In Paul’s epistles to the Galatians and Romans, the themes of adoption and inheritance are prominent, particularly in Gal 3:23–4:7 and Rom 8:14–25. In Rom 4:13, the true descendants of Abraham are promised that they "would inherit the world." This denotes an inheritance that is substantial—even cosmic—in its proportions. It is an inheritance closely tied to the concept of "new creation" (Gal 6:15), which is central to Paul’s thinking.

In examining these inheritance texts in Galatians and Romans it is necessary to address two questions: Who inherits? and What kind of inheritance do they receive? Some have suggested that these passages—especially Gal 3:28—are to be interpreted solely in terms of salvation. However, the Galatian and Roman letters present ample evidence that inheritance goes beyond soteriology (the work of Christ) to encompass social and ecclesiological issues as well. Indeed, it has the potential to impact every area of the Christian life and even the whole of creation. The context of Galatians is crucial for this interpretation of Gal 3:28 and its surrounding discussion of inheritance. The context of Paul’s account of the Antioch incident in Gal 2:11–14 sets the stage for how Gal 3:28 is to be understood and, moreover, how to apply it in the twenty-first century.

By framing Gal 3:28 as a discussion of inheritance Paul shows that all are included, whether male or female, and regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status. The contexts of the two texts demonstrate two important features of inheritance: its inclusive nature and its participatory nature. These texts pave the way for women as well as men to be included as full participants who work together in Christ for the kingdom of God.

Paul’s Paradoxical Language

Since my argument is that the inheritance texts in Galatians and Romans promote the full inclusion and participation of all, whether male or female, it is necessary to briefly address the issue of the non-inclusive language used by Paul, such as huiothesia ("son") and huiothesia ("adoption as sons"). There is a paradox here—one that Paul seems to put forward intentionally. The very fact that he is using exclusive terminology and then describing inclusivity, the removal of barriers to inheritance in Gal 3:28, makes the inclusive statement all the more impactful. As Sandra Polaski notes, "The grammar may be gender-exclusive, but the image it invites us to imagine reaches beyond generic sameness to a celebration of diverse mutuality."2 Paul thus uses the exclusive terminology of the sonship metaphor to show how women and slaves are also given the privileged status of sons and heirs.

In Christ

In Gal 3:23–4:7, the phrase en Christō Iēsou ("in Christ Jesus") is central, occurring in 3:26 where it relates to how we are sons ("children" in NRSV) of God, and in 3:28 where it defines our oneness as believers. It also occurs earlier in 3:14, where it is the means by which the Gentiles receive "the blessing of Abraham." The phrase "in Christ Jesus" does not occur in Rom 8:14–25. However, it does occur in Rom 8:1–2 and 8:39, thus framing the chapter with references to the reality that in Christ we are no longer under condemnation (8:1),3 and to the reality of God’s love for us in Christ Jesus (8:39). These passages work together to show that being in Christ is requisite for the members of his church. In fact, according to Beverly Roberts Gaventa, it is "the first and most important thing to be said about us," as seen in Gal 3:28.4 It means that there are no more barriers between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free persons, and males and females.5 It means there is now a radical inclusiveness which is possible because the faith community "is no longer defined by physical fatherhood."6 Significantly, in both Galatians and Romans, being in Christ also impacts our everyday lives because the truth that we are in Christ is lived out in us.7

All-Inclusiveness

Several indicators confirm that the message of Gal 3–4 applies to all. One is the word pantes ("all") which occurs in Gal 3:26 and 3:28. What is emphasized in 3:26 is that Gentiles have already become sons of God.8 The clear link between Gal 3:26 and 3:28 shows that every believer, female and male, is a child of God.9 Moreover, because sons are heirs, the all-inclusiveness also applies to inheritance (Gal 4:7; Rom 8:17). However, God’s generous redemptive activity moves even beyond the adoption of believers as sons who inherit to expansively encompass all of God’s creation (Rom 8:22–23).10

Although land is the typical OT concept of inheritance, it can also effectively represent God’s inheritance in the NT. Brueggemann notes, "Land is for sharing with all the heirs of the covenant, even those who have no power to claim it. Something about land makes one forget them, makes one insensitive to them."11 The dispossessed are prevented from receiving a full inheritance and need the Father whose “good pleasure” (Luke 12:32) it is graciously to give us the kingdom inheritance.12 Through the process of adoption, slaves become sons of the Father and are then identified as heirs (Gal 4:7; Rom 8:15–17).13

Gentiles and Jews alike have a claim to this promised inheritance, for they are deemed “Abraham’s offspring” (Gal 3:29).14 The inclusive nature of inheritance is brought out by the fact that all—male and female—have the same “legal status of son” in God’s presence and that this status includes inheritance.15
Notably, Gal 3:28 is framed by the language of heirs and inheritance (3:18, 29, 41, 7). Moreover, Rom 8:17 proclaims that we, as God’s children, are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”

The matter of what the inheritance looks like is also central to this discussion. N. T. Wright observes that, in Rom 8, the land inheritance has become the entire renewed cosmos—the new creation. Daniel Kirk aptly designates this as a “new creation inheritance.” The basis for this understanding of inheritance as the whole creation is in Rom 4:13: “For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith” (NRSV). Abraham’s true descendants are to inherit the world. This is, indeed, a generous, expansive inheritance.

Jews and Gentiles

The issue of Jewish and Gentile relations within the church is central in both Galatians and Romans. It is particularly significant because Paul considers his calling and mission to be to the Gentiles. The primary concern for him is for Gentiles to be included in God’s people.

A major problem to be confronted in the Galatian church is that the Jews were treating the Gentiles “as second-class citizens in the church.” The context for this treatment, according to F. F. Bruce, is the historical “cleavage between Jew and Gentile.” Wayne Meeks points out another critical issue for Paul—that both Gentiles and Jews without Christ are viewed by Paul as being enslaved and are therefore both outsiders.

The solution for Paul is reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile followers of Christ. This reconciliation is brought about by a God who “shows no partiality” between Jews and Gentiles (Rom 2:11). Both Jews and Gentiles can now be the sons of God who is the Father of both. This all can happen through the adoption of both Jews and Gentiles as children of God. Marianne Meye Thompson observes that this adoption is “now expressed in the language of family and inheritance, and testifies to God’s faithfulness to the Jews, the children of Abraham, and God’s mercy to the Gentiles, also the children of Abraham.” Thus, through the love and mercy of God, Gentiles and Jews can have true unity and the promise of God’s inheritance.

The Antioch Incident and Table Fellowship

Related to the Jew/Gentile issue, whether members of divergent groups can come together at a common meal is crucial for a study of inclusive inheritance in Galatians and Romans. This question is well demonstrated in the Antioch incident Paul recounts to the Galatians. Paul’s description of this event helps clarify the nature of the inheritance he later addresses in Gal 3:26–4:7. Two essential characteristics of the inheritance are its inclusiveness and its breadth; it relates not only to salvation—as some would claim—but impacts who we are and what we do, including what happens in the church of Christ. It is this dynamic renewing nature of the inheritance that indicates that it is a new creation inheritance.

In Gal 2:11–14, Paul tells of a conflict with Cephas (Peter) at Antioch because Peter has ceased eating with Gentiles. This clearly is of great consequence to Paul. Scholars are nearly unanimous in declaring that this passage is central to the message of Galatians and had social and ecclesiological implications for those who embraced the good news of Jesus Christ. The actions of Peter and those who followed in his footsteps resulted in the excluded Gentiles being viewed as “at best second-class citizens in the new community.” For Paul, this was a crucial issue tied to the good news of Jesus Christ.

The heart of the matter was that Jews and Gentiles were once again being separated into two groups. The gospel was therefore at risk and Paul was concerned—even furious—enough to confront Peter publically (Gal 2:14). This was clearly not only a spiritual issue but one that impacted church life. It applies to the Jew/Gentile pair but also has unmistakable relevance for the other two pairs of Gal 3:28 (slave/free, male/female). Daniel Boyarin astutely poses the following question: “If Paul took ‘no Jew or Greek’ as seriously as all of Galatians attests that he clearly did, how could he possibly—unless he is a hypocrite or incoherent—not have taken ‘no male and female’ with equal seriousness?”

Unified table fellowship was essential to Paul. By his response to Peter in Gal 2:11–14, he showed that “he knew of the meal’s power to work for the integration of differences.” Hal Taussig describes the concept of table fellowship in early church congregations as a “social experiment” where they used a common cultural phenomenon to bring about a re-visioning of community in terms of gender, ethnicity, status and religion. This practice gave access to a common table for many who would not usually have shared a meal. For Paul, Christian unity was unavoidably linked to who was willing to eat together. In turn, the context of the table fellowship discussion in Gal 2 has an impact on how Gal 3:28 is interpreted. “Paul clearly intended 3:28 to prohibit excluding Gentiles as a group from any privilege or position in the church,” and they were to be treated as equals and welcomed to the table. If this is the case for Gentiles, we can conclude that this would also apply to the other groups addressed in Gal 3:28, including male and female.

Circumcision or Baptism?

Another matter connected with the Jew/Gentile issue is whether circumcision or baptism is the preferred entrance ritual into the Christian community. The Galatian and Roman epistles illustrate that Paul overwhelmingly favors baptism over circumcision for several reasons.

Circumcision physically marks off people into distinctive groups, whereas with baptism such markers no longer play a part. Circumcision therefore takes believers backwards because they are unnecessarily trying to fulfill the law. The rite of circumcision also excludes and overlooks women, whereas baptism is inclusive and makes way for “full participation” of both women and Gentiles in the faith community.

However, Paul’s most convincing line of reasoning against circumcision as an entrance rite to Christian community is almost certainly the new creation argument in Gal 6:15: “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!” This concept is foundational to Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In the new creation, women and men have equal access and space is made for them to participate together.
Maternal Imagery and the Obsolescence of Patrilineal Genealogy

There is a noticeable movement in Galatians and Romans away from a system of genealogy that is dependent on male biology to one that is God-centred. Paul uses imagery of matrilineal descent and adoption to emphasize this God-centeredness.

Traditionally, to be a descendent of Abraham meant male descent passed on from father to son.44 Both Gal 3:23–4:5 and Rom 8:14–25 have background material in which Abraham is identified as the progenitor of the line to which all believers belong. However, in neither case is this lineage shown to be determined physically.47 There is a redefinition of the phrase in Gal 3:16 and Rom 4:13, Abraam . . . to spermati autou (“Abraham’s seed”), which is in the person of Christ, giving rise to a “strictly christo-centric spermatology.”48 Male genealogy is truly on its way out in terms of the faith community. Both Jews and Gentiles have their genealogy reconfigured away from male descent.49 Christ has brought about the obsolescence of patrilineal lineage.

With this shift in focus away from male descent, Paul uses several images which incorporate the idea of matrilineal genealogy. One reason for this is that, in first-century culture, power over the family line is held by the father and the concept of matrilineal descent would be seen as a subversive reversal.50 In Gal 4:21–31, in the context of his allegorical comparison of Hagar and Sarah, Paul contrasts “non-biological motherhood as children of ‘promise’”51 with what he describes as a biological parentage—being “born according to the flesh”—equated to enslavement (Gal 4:23 NRSV; cf. 4:25, 29–31). Of primary importance in Paul’s writings is the fact that “Jesus’ story is a narrative of matrilineal descent.”52 It is not the anatomy of the male that determines human destiny, but rather our adoption in Christ—the true Seed—by the Father.53

In overturning the old model of genealogy, the apostle Paul’s argument is always focused on the good news in Christ. This good news allows for and, indeed, calls for an overturning of patriarchy and the narrow definition of male descent. Concerning this, Brigitte Kahl observes the following: “In his rereading of the Genesis story in Galatians 3–4 Paul develops a concept of fatherhood and motherhood that could be a nightmare to anyone interested in ‘orderly’ patriarchal categories and cultural practices.”54 Since inheritance is so closely tied to genealogy, the shift is therefore from an inheritance that is narrow and rigid to one that is wide and inclusive.

There are other examples of mother imagery in Romans and Galatians. Mother and birth terms stand out as dominant in Gal 4,55 including a maternal metaphor that Paul uses of himself. In Gal 4:19, the apostle addresses the Galatians as “my little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (NRSV). This metaphor identifies Paul with women56 and would therefore have been a humbling image for him to use of himself.57 It is therefore quite an unexpected and noteworthy occurrence.58

In Rom 8:22, Paul—one once again notably59—uses a maternal metaphor in the midst of his inheritance and adoption discussion, when he announces that “the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.” The surrounding context in Rom 8:18–25 highlights the hope of new creation in a meaningful way showing the birth pains to be worthwhile and productive.60

Gaventa proposes that Paul uses the maternal metaphor, as he does other metaphors, to persuade his readers to consider things in a new way so that they will change their minds about something.61 He is fostering an intimate relationship with his audience.62 I suggest that he also has another objective in Galatians and Romans: by using gender-inclusive metaphors, Paul is emphasizing the inclusivity of the good news of adoption, inheritance and new creation for all, regardless of whether they are male or female.

Gender Inclusiveness and the Far-Reaching Impact of Galatians 3:28

The words of Gal 3:28—“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (NRSV)—are considered a powerful statement of equality and “border-transgressing unity” for all, including women.63 Klyne Snodgrass calls this text “the most socially explosive statement in the New Testament.”64 These assessments are not overly extravagant; Paul’s declaration has the potential to revolutionize Christian life.

It is essential to emphasize that Paul framed this verse in the language of inheritance.65 A question then to be asked is: What does Gal 3:28 tell us about what an heir is and what an heir inherits? Paul is using this passage to widen the scope of who is considered an heir—Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female. Additionally, from the context of the Antioch incident in Gal 2, it is evident that the inheritance cannot be limited to something that is only soteriological and has no relevance for practical and ecclesiological matters.

Typical of the perspective that Gal 3:28 has only to do with salvation is S. Lewis Johnson Jr. who maintains that this text exclusively concerns a person’s “spiritual status in Christ.”66 While no one would deny that Gal 3:28 has a spiritual meaning, to limit it to this aspect raises serious concerns.67 Several contextual reasons make it impossible to interpret Gal 3:28 purely soteriologically with no social implications.68

One key point is that women and slaves in Israel were already considered part of the covenant community, so Paul would have been declaring nothing new if he was only talking about coming to faith.69 Similarly, there were no expectations that being male or free was a requirement to be a follower of Christ, but there were problems with the Jew/Gentile question.70 In fact, because of his calling to the Gentiles, Paul was especially focused on the issue of ethnicity, although he certainly took the other pairs seriously.71

Clearly, Gal 3:28 has not eradicated distinctions.72 For example, hierarchical human structures continue despite what Paul has announced. However, while these distinctions still exist, the words of Gal 3:28 level out “values and structural norms imposed on these distinctions.”73 Johnson, perceiving the existence of role distinctions within the church, asks whether “distinction of roles of believers within that equality necessarily violates that equality.”74 In response, Philip Payne comments, “If such distinctions of roles are based on the gifts and callings of individual believers, they would not violate that equality.” However, exclusion based on whether one is female or male would certainly harm that equality.75
CBE International
in partnership with
Gender Equality Matters in Africa
& CBE South Africa
present

TRUTH BE TOLD
SPEAKING OUT AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

SEPTEMBER 14 - 17, 2016 | RHEMA MINISTRIES
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

And you will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free
John 8:32
SPEAKERS

Stanley Arumugam
International HR Director, ActionAid

Esme Bowers
Intl Secretary, Lausanne Movement; Chair, African Women in Missions Network

Wayne Chafunya
Pastor/Head of Young Adult Ministry, Rhema Bible Church North

Maclean Dlodlo
Senior Advisor for Faith and Gender in Development, World Vision Global Center

Antoinette Erasmus
Senior Pastor, Corpus Christi AFM Church, Midrand

Mimi Haddad
President, Christians for Biblical Equality

Janice Kaufmann-Chafunya
Pastor/Head of Women’s Ministries, Rhema Bible Church North

Christina Landman
Director of Research, Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa

Desmond Lesejane
Pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa; Director, Sonke Gender Justice Network

Pelham Lessing
Pastor, Crossover Church, Turfontein; Lecturer, South African Theological Seminary–Rivonia

Marianne Louw
Pastor, Connexions Church; Head of Communications and Media, Monash South Africa

Keketso Maema
CEO, Commission for Gender Equality in South Africa

Alan McCauley
Pastor, Rhema Bible Church North; Co-founder, Hands of Compassion

Ray McCauley
Founder/Senior Pastor, Rhema Bible Church North

Xana McCauley
Pastor, Rhema Bible Church North; Founder, CBE-South Africa; Co-founder, Hands of Compassion

Domnic Misolo
Founder/Executive Director, Ekklesia Foundation for Gender Education

Emily Onyango
Priest, Anglican Church of Kenya; Sr. Lecturer, St. Paul’s University

Miranda Pillay
Sr. Lecturer in New Testament Studies and Ethics, University of the Western Cape.

Ethel Schultz Pittaway
Canon (priest), Anglican Diocese of Port Elizabeth

Bronwyn Stanford
Pastor, Dept. Head, Rhema Children’s Ministry

Rethie van Niekerk
Pastor, Dutch Reformed Church, Summerstrand, Port Elizabeth

Lyn van Rooyen
Director, Christian AIDS Bureau for South Africa
Clearly, the truth of Gal 3:28 impacts not only spiritual status, but also social status and relationships. This is certainly the case in Paul's response to Peter at Antioch over table fellowship. This incident indicates that his goal for the churches of Christ is "complete social integration."76 With the reconfiguring of relationships, patriarchal modes of encounter must also be challenged, and "no structures of dominance can be tolerated" any longer.77 This also means there were consequences, not only for women, but for men who adopted Paul's new paradigm. If they were free men, they would likely have to give up honor in order to foster equality with others—something remarkable for that time.78

Paul, in describing new creation to the Corinthians, declares that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor 5:17 NRSV, emphasis added). It is worthwhile noting that, as in Gal 3:28, he also uses "in Christ" (en Christō) language here. It is also significant that he uses the word "everything" twice, highlighting the reality that new creation impacts all of life. Therefore, by restricting the scope of Gal 3:28 to only the spiritual, Johnson offers a woefully limited inheritance which does not fit with the concept of the full, new creation inheritance that Paul depicts in his writings.

**Full Participation in Church Life**

Proper application of Gal 3:28 would allow for women to participate fully in the life of the church. Any limitations would detract from the verse's ideal intention for the church. There are parallels for Gal 3:28 at Col 3:11 and 1 Cor 12:3.79 In both of these, practical matters of church life are addressed.80 The male/female pair only occurs in Gal 3:28, which is noteworthy because it could have been left out but was not.81 All indications are that this text was intended to have significant ecclesiological consequences for women—that is, in terms of who the people of God are and how they interact with each other in the practical life of the church.82 This would make sense, for Paul was speaking to and about women, as members of the Galatian congregations, about baptism—the rite of entry into the faith community. His concern would be how this faith community lived out their faith.

The practicality of this Pauline saying is also unmistakable when we consider it in the context of the promises to Abraham (Gal 3:14, 29) which Johnson considers merely spiritual.83 Payne rightly points out that all of the blessings to Abraham—and through him to the covenant community—in Gen 12:2–3 are of a social and practical nature rather than only spiritual.84

Further evidence of the functional nature of Gal 3:28 is seen in the rabbinical prayer—a precursor of which was thought to be behind the formulation of Gal 3:28—in which male Jews give thanks for not being born a Gentile, slave, or woman.85 What is interesting is that members of these three groups did not participate in study of Torah; thus the prayer emphasized how they were excluded from the opportunity of studying Torah. If this prayer was being renounced by Paul, those who had formerly been excluded from such activities would now be included.86

In his assertion that "role distinctions" are not eliminated in Gal 3:28, Johnson indicates that there are restrictions to what women can do in the church, including prohibitions on certain types of authoritative ministry and preaching.87 In restricting ministry and leadership in any way, one risks flouting the Pauline teaching on the proper practice of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12:7.88 For Payne, recalling the context of the Galatian epistle and the narrative of the Antioch incident gives further rationale for encouraging women to use whatever leadership and ministry gifts they might have: "Galatians 2:11–14 shows how strongly Paul would have reacted if anyone had used 'role distinctions' to exclude Gentiles or slaves from leadership roles in the church."89

Those who promote limitations on women's ministry would thereby also restrict the preaching of the gospel. In response to this, Susie Stanley justifiably wonders if we can "separate the good news of the gospel from the fact that the 'freedom found in Christ' includes the freedom for all believers, men and women, to share that good news?"90 It is inconceivable that Paul would want to restrict the preaching of his beloved gospel in any way (cf. Phil 1:15–18).

Paul himself fully embraced not only Gentiles but slaves and women in all areas of church life and ministry.83 He was able to apply the truth of Gal 3:28, that there was no longer male and female, in his own life and ministry.92

All of this evidence points to the full inclusion of women in the church. Women, as well as men, are welcomed not only as members of the faith community but as participants wholly dedicated to the good news of Christ and working together for God's kingdom.93

**New Creation and Ethics in Galatians 3:28**

In both Galatians and Romans, Paul reveals how God is doing a new thing in providing adoption and inheritance to those in Christ.94 It is therefore not surprising that we find evidence of new creation in Gal 3:28. This is indicated by the phrase arsēn kai thēlu ("male and female") which is also used in the Septuagint of Gen 1:27 and pertains to the first creation in Genesis and the new creation in Gal 3:28.95 Payne describes how this new creation looks in terms of Gal 3:28:

> Central to this new creation is the new "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16) that gives no privileged status to Jews over Gentiles, to free persons over slaves, or to men over women. They are all one in Christ Jesus, redeemed from sin and the law by Christ and welcomed into the family of God. All now live in Christ, freed from control by the principles of the world and heirs of God's promises to Abraham. No one is a second-class citizen or excluded by ethnic-religious background, economic status, or gender from any position or privilege in the church.96

New creation therefore has an impact on our ethical conduct—how we interact with and treat each other in community. Love is the basis for right conduct in the Pauline writings. In Gal 5:13–14,97 we are called to love each other by becoming like "slaves to one another"—in essence, we are asked to take on one of the marginalized positions in Gal 3:28.98 The ethics of this love has no place for ethnic, status, or gender discrimination in the church.99 Rather, ungodly patriarchy is transformed "into patterns of active mutuality and solidarity."100 If we hold true to Paul's inspirational words in Gal 3:28, our ethics will assuredly be transformed.
Inheritance and the New Creation Vision

Concerning Gal 3:28, Mary Ann Tolbert says, “the open incorporation of believers of all races, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds into full and equal partnership in the traditional contract of God to Abraham and the Jewish people was an act of outrageous inclusivity.”101 It is a pity if this outrageousness is not taken to its full potential by those who are in Christ.

Galatians 3:28 is contained within Paul’s exploration of adoption and inheritance. Therefore, when one limits the scope of Paul’s pronouncement of inheritance, it says something about what that inheritance is. It is an insult to the loving Father who adopts us and gives us inheritance to make it into something less than the vast and immeasurably good thing it is. Instead, let us fully implement Paul’s vision of unity and equal fellowship in Christ.102

The vital message of new creation is heard throughout the Galatian epistle—within the phrase arsen kai thēla in Gal 3:28 as well as the proclamation in Gal 6:15 that “a new creation is everything!”103 Fee suggests that an inclusive embrace of Gentiles is “deeply embedded” in the new creation context of Gal 6:15 and in the message of Galatians.104 This is certainly also true of Paul’s letter to the Romans.105

In the new creation, male and female become sisters and brothers,106 a family, a community, a “new humanity.”107 And in this new kind of family, there is no place for a perspective that allows men to have sole authority over women.108 What does have an important place in the new creation is an eschatological table fellowship which prophetically brings the not yet into the already. Fee gives us a vivid picture: “In the gathered community only ‘new creation’ practices are welcome: thus husbands and wives, masters and slaves, Jew and Gentile all feast together in anticipation of the great final eschatological banquet.”109

And in the new creation community there is also inheritance. It is, as Kirk portrays it, “the resurrection glory of the new creation inheritance.”110 This inheritance will of course have its consummation in the future renewal of all things. However, it undoubtedly also invades every aspect of Christian life and community in the here and now.

Conclusion

The promise is given to us as Abraham’s descendants that we “would inherit the world” (Rom 4:13). If the word “only” needs to be used to describe this inheritance—that it only applies to our salvation—then it is, indeed, a small world that we inherit. In complete contrast, the letters of Paul show our inheritance to be vast and infinite, invading every area of our lives and the life of the church of Christ. It is a world where “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of us are one in Christ Jesus.” It is a “new creation inheritance”111 that is meant for all. Anything less shrinks the world we inherit for both women and men and is thus an insult to the Giver of this good gift.

As stewards of God’s good gift of inheritance we are called to move forward, to work together as women and men in Christ toward the full implementation of Paul’s spectacular vision in Gal 3:28.112 Jim Reiher tells us that, looking back, we can see a historical movement—from Paul’s early efforts to bring about liberation for the Gentiles, to the massive endeavour leading to the nineteenth-century abolition of slavery. Now, in our time, we hear the call to work toward the liberation of women from the bonds keeping them subject to men including, sadly, in the church. Such a trajectory will lead to the undermining and subversion of patriarchal systems in our world and in our churches that oppress and subjugate the marginalized.113 This is the true work of God’s justice. What can we do other than to heed this call?

Notes

2. Sandra Hack Polaski, A Feminist Introduction to Paul (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 71. She goes on to observe the following: “If, as has often been argued, the lower strata of society comprised the bulk of Paul’s congregations, then for males and females alike the promise of ‘adoption as sons’ would sound as a word of hope, beyond the reality of their present physical circumstances. Freedom, responsibility, investment with an inheritance—all these can only be promised to believers through the gender-exclusive metaphor of sonship….” In Christ God offers all persons—Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female—the privileged status that can only be described as ‘sons of God’ (71–72).
8. James D. G. Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1993), 202. In Rom 8:14, the word is hosoi (“as many as”) translated as “all who” in the NRSV.
11. Brueggemann, The Land, 66; cf. J. R. Daniel Kirk, Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 156, on the use of land to depict inheritance in Romans. Land is a helpful way of understanding inheritance in Paul’s writings because of its this-worldly nature and the expectation of “living faithfully in history” (Brueggemann, The Land, 178).
Knox, 1992), 334. Osiek points out that, with this term, daughters are given an equal inheritance status with sons that they would not otherwise have. Elizabeth A. Castelli, on the other hand, contends that the use of gender-exclusive inheritance terms has the effect—although not necessarily intentional—of marginalizing women: Castelli, "Romans," in Searching the Scriptures, Volume Two: A Feminist Commentary (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; New York: Crossroad, 1994), 291.


17. Kirk, Unlocking Romans, 156. "Those who are in Christ will see with their eyes the consummation of God’s love for them in the resurrection glory of the new creation inheritance."


21. Payne, Man and Woman, 82.

22. F. E. Bruce, The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 188.


24. Gaventa identifies this as a central purpose of Romans ("Romans," 315). Fee observes that, in Galatians, "through the work of Christ and the gift of the Spirit ... the ground has been leveled" between Jewish and Gentile believers ("Male and Female," 174).

25. The impartiality of God is brought out in both Galatians and Romans (Meeks, First Urban Christians, 168). An example in Galatians would of course be Gal 3:28.


31. Longenecker, Galatians, 65.

32. Fee, Galatians, 79; Morris, Galatians, 81; Reiter, "Galatians 3:28," 274.


34. Taussig, In the Beginning Was the Meal, 74.

35. Taussig, In the Beginning Was the Meal, 174; cf. 71 and 146. In the context of Rom 14–15, which also deals with food and meal issues in relation to Jewish and Gentile differences, Kathy Ehrensperger finds a "concrete testing ground of what otherwise would be a purely theoretical faith." Such a faith "is either practical or it is nothing at all". Ehrensperger, "New Perspectives on Paul: New Perspectives on Romans in Feminist Theology?" in Gender, Tradition and Romans: Shared Ground, Uncertain Borders (ed. Christina Grenholm and Daniel Patte; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 238.


37. Taussig, In the Beginning Was the Meal, 179.

38. Payne, Man and Woman, One in Christ, 83.


40. Fee, Galatians, 140.


45. The background material on Abraham for Gal 3:23–47 is given earlier in Gal 3.

46. The background material on Abraham for Rom 8:14–25 is given in Rom 4.


52. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God’s Family (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 108. This is true even if Gal 4:4 is not referring to the virgin birth, as noted by Morris, Galatians, 215; Osiek, "Galatians," 334–35. Paul, in any case, is clear throughout the rest of Galatians and Romans that human male biology is simply not necessary in the descent of Christ.

53. Stevenson-Moessner, The Spirit of Adoption, 110. Stevenson-Moessner shows how adoption is contrasted with the OT concept of the male seed (103).


56. Osiek, "Galatians," 336. "Perhaps a man willing to use such an image is not as alienated from women’s experience as Paul is often made out to be."

57. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Our Mother St. Paul: Toward the Recovery of a Neglected Theme," in A Feminist Companion to Paul (ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blinksenstaff; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 96. Gaventa observes here that, "when Paul presents himself as a mother, he voluntarily hands over the authority of a patriarch in favor of a role that will bring him shame, the shame of a female-identified male. Still, maternal imagery becomes effective precisely because it plays on hierarchical expectations." Gaventa (90) notes that, other than when he calls God Father, Paul uses motherhood imagery more frequently than father imagery.


59. Burke, Adopted Into God’s Family, 186; Gaventa, "Romans," 318.

60. Polaski, A Feminist Introduction, 84–85.


Inexplicably, Johnson finds that God never gives women certain gifts of the Spirit such as teaching and administration, or they restrict the use of those gifts even though Paul explains that the gifts are for the common good” (Payne, Man and Woman, 104).

89. Payne, Man and Woman, 104.

90. Fee, “Male and Female,” 185.


92. Jewett, Man as Male and Female, 147.

93. Fee observes that Rom 15 shows that “the eschatological inclusion of the Gentiles with Jews as one people of God [is] its main point.” Longenecker observes that the renewal of God’s people and the entire creation in Christ and the Spirit is a major theme of Romans 5–8 (Introducing Romans, 408); cf. Polaski, A Feminist Introduction, 90.

94. Fee, “Male and Female,” 185.

95. Fee asserts that such a “male-authority viewpoint . . . reject[s] the new creation in favor of the norms of a fallen world”.

96. Fee, “Male and Female,” 185.

97. Fee, “Male and Female,” 185.

98. Jewett, Man as Male and Female, 147.


100. Fee, Male and Female, 177.


102. Jewett, Man as Male and Female, 147.


104. Fee, “Male and Female,” 185.


107. Fee, Male and Female, 185; Gasque, “Response,” 189.

108. Fee, “Male and Female,” 185. Fee asserts that such a “male-authority viewpoint . . . reject[s] the new creation in favor of the norms of a fallen world.”


111. Kirk, Unlocking Romans, 156.

112. Jewett, Man as Male and Female, 147.


114. Fee, Male and Female, 183. “This does not abolish the system, but carried through by Philemon, it dismantles the significance given to it (and in this indirect way, of course, heads toward the dismantling of the system itself)!"

James Dunn likewise observes that “it is highly unlikely that he would have allowed gender or social status as such, any more than race, to constitute a barrier to any service of the gospel” (The Epistle to the Galatians, 207).

91. Payne, Man and Woman, 89.

92. Jewett mentions the women of Rom 16 in this regard (Man as Male and Female, 145).

93. The concept of women’s “full participation” in church life and ministry is one that Payne repeatedly emphasizes (Man and Woman, 81, 93, 97; cf. 85, 99).

94. Payne says of the new creation theme in Galatians that it is “always pointing to the new life in Christ lived through the Spirit” (Man and Woman, 92).