

**Hermeneutical Implications of Paul's  
Attitude towards Ethnicity in  
Galatians 3: 28 for Contemporary  
Nigerian Society**  
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**Abstract**

Paul in Galatians 3:28 declared "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." From this text, is Paul advocating a situation in which the difference between Jew and Greek, bond and free would be totally abolished? Was Paul aware of the ugly discrimination in our country arising from overt ethnicity? What would he say in a state like ours where various ethnic groups do their own thing like a state within the state? Using contextualization approach, it is discovered that Paul's plea in Galatians 3:28 can simply be described as an invitation to overlook the apparently unavoidable tribal differences. Thus, tribal consciousness or exaltation of a tribe above others must give way for nationalism. This is with a view to create room for peaceful co-existence and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** *Ethnicity, Nigeria; democracy; Galatians 3:28; St. Paul*

**Introduction**

***"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).***

The above-quoted declaration of Paul in Gal. 3:28 is indeed the hallmark of his theology of liberation and, in fact, the Magna Carta of the abolition of all discriminations among ethnic groups, economic exploitation of the poor by the rich and sexism (Manus, 1982). Now when sober reflections on the political happenings are more than urgent, a

Buhari led administration most especially when one considers the allegation coming from some quarters that the president himself (Muhammed Buhari) is tribalistic in his governance. It expresses a commitment on the part of all Christians in Nigeria to do away with class, tribe, party, state divisions, and any form of ethnicity that is crippling our peaceful co-existence, national unity and whatever international image we have. Does Gal. 3: 28 support a realistic commitment to the de-tribalization of our institutions and national outlook or is it a pious admonition to stay passive to problems of nepotism, oppression, corrupt politics and evils of exploitation? What does the text say precisely and to what extent can Paul's lifestyle help us perceive what he meant? These and many other critical issues form the fulcrum of this research paper.

### **Ethnicity as a Concept**

Osaghae (1995, p. 11) defines ethnicity as "the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain an advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation." Following the line of thought of Ukiwo (2005, p. 4), this definition is purposively chosen because it pinpoints two fundamental issues that are germane to any dialogue on ethnicity. The first is that "ethnicity is neither natural nor accidental, but it is the product of a conscious effort by social actors". The second is that "ethnicity is not only manifest in conflictive or competitive relations but also in the contexts of cooperation" (Ukiwo, 2005, p. 4). Sequel to the second issue raised is that ethnic conflict shows its ugly head in diverse ways such as community service, voting, and violence.

Consequently, it does not always have negative results. Ethnicity

also encloses the action of ethnic groups which is often a group of people with acquired membership. However, the membership is not always underpinned on claims or myths of share, ancestry, culture history, territory language, religion, and race (Ukiwo, 2005, p. 4). Indeed, not all these variables need to be present before a group is so delineated, the most significant thing is that such a group is ranked or categorized as having a collective identity that differentiates it from others. It is this categorization according to Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov (2004, pp. 31-32) by mighty agencies such as the state, religious institutions, local ethnic historians and the intelligentsia that "objectifies the ethnic group, often setting in motion processes of self-identification or affirmation and recognition by others". Thus, ethnicity is not so much a matter of 'shared traits or cultural commonalities', but the result of the interplay between external categorization and self-identification."

Generally speaking, Adeniji and Ofiwe (2015, p. 73) describes ethnicity or ethnic group as a socio-cultural entity "while inhabiting the same state, country or economic area, consider themselves biologically, culturally, linguistically or socially distinct from each other and most often view their relation in actual or potentially antagonistic terms." Azeez opines that ethnicity carries a sense of peoplehood and that it has its base in the joint memorial of past experience and common agitation (Azeez, 2009, p. 329).

The term ethnicity, according to Adeniji and Ofiwe (2015, p. 75), comes from the Greek word *ethnos*, usually translated to mean nation. In its current usage, it refers to people thought to have common ancestry and who share a distinctive culture. Similarly, an ethnic group refers to a

group of people whose members identify and relate with each other as a result of a common heritage that binds them together which consists of a common culture including a shared language or dialect. The procedure that led to the emergence of an ethnicity is called "ethnogenesis" ( Adeniji &Ofiwe,2015,p. 75).

Ethnicity in the words of Nnoli (1978, p. 5) is as a "social phenomenon associated with ( communal) competition among members of different ethnic groups. While 'ethnic groups' are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries and membership, especially language, culture or both, with language constituting the most crucial variable in Africa." Furthermore, Nnoli identifies the following as features of ethnicity:

- I. Ethnicity subsists and thrives when multiple ethnic groups characterize a nation-state;
- II. Ethnicity is characterized by an element of collective consciousness vis-a-vis other ethnic groups;
- III. Ethnicity leads to the formation of inclusive/exclusive groups and attitudes;
- IV. It, in turn, leads to prejudice, discrimination and outright hostility (Nnoli, 1988, pp. 5-7).

Moreover, ethnicity, according to Wikipedia, is the state of being arrayed in or championing the case of, an ethnic group or groups. In terms of congruency, ethnicity in popular cultural terms also refer to a way of thinking or comporting in which people are more devoted or faithful to their ethnic group than to their country, friends, or any other social group. Glazer and Moynihan (1975, p. 85) in their view describes



ethnicity as a 'way of being' based upon various combinations which include kinship-based organization, oral communication, analogical enquiry and reciprocal exchange. It is equally defined as "a marker for social groups who perceive a distinct sense of their diversities as a result of their common culture and descent" (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975,86).

This subject, as expressed by Adeyanju (2012, p. 1), is critical because while tribal societies have been moved to the edges of globalization, ethnicity is arguably not depreciating. Since it is established upon intense feelings of shared identity that leads people to feel ethnically linked or related. This kind of relationship in the view of Adeyanju (2012, p. 1) is often more about the feeling of commonality than actual commonality; and that is why it is as powerful like religion in Africa. This buttress a common saying among the Yorubas that "*omo eni o sedi bebere kafi' leke sidi omo elomiran*" implying that "you cannot have a pretty child ( especially a female child) in your custody and still be looking outside to decorate another person's child." The implication of this saying in the context of this paper is that if you are a Yoruba person by tribe, you must do everything possible to favor somebody that is of the same tribe with you even at the detriment of people from other tribes.

Situating ethnicity to Nigerian context, Nnoli (2008, pp. 6-7) explains ethnicity as social prodigy associated with the identity of members of a competing tribal group( s) seeking to defend and promote their vested interest in a political system. The relevant communal factors in this situation may be culture, race, language, religion or shared history. A corollary to this is another common saying among the Yorubas in Nigeria that "*teni ni teni, ti utan ni akisa*" meaning "what belongs to you is

your own, rags belong to dumping ground". The implication of this is that people/someone from your ethnic group, religion or culture are/is your own and must be given preference or particular concern while people/someone from other tribes, religion or culture should not give you much concern because they belong to another ethnic group. One major thing that characterizes ethnicity according to Nnoli (2008, p. 6) is that in most cases it requires (as a necessary accompaniment) demands by one group on the other rival group( s ). In Achebe's view, ethnicity is the unfair treatment of or discrimination against a citizen as a result of his/her place of birth (Achebe, 1997, pp. 5-6).

#### **A Brief Historical Survey of Ethnicity in Nigeria**

Tracing the origin of ethnicity in Nigeria, Kalu (2004, p. 9) opines that it started during the era of colonial masters. The colonial masters during colonialism depended and made use of force as a mechanism of controlling and subjecting the indigenous people in implementing and advancing their parochial interests. The indigenous people who felt threatened by the action of the colonial masters were pressed to seek and look for aid and survival in the local community groups such as the tribal and national groups thus: the beginning of ethnic identification, affiliation, and nationalism. The ethnic groups at this time served as the only way or stand of resistance to colonialism. Kalu (2004, p. 9) states that "Nigerians individually and collectively tend not to have allegiance to the state-imposed by the British in 1914". Hence, most Nigerians irrespective of their nationalist claims tend to first identify with their ethnic root before identifying themselves as Nigerians.

The ethnic awareness among various ethnic groups in Nigeria in the opinion of Adeniji and Ofiwe (2015, pp. 75-76) gradually advanced into political consciousness because, various ethnic/urban groups or associations were able to provide the needed leadership to those who were living in the rural areas and, above all political enlightenment. Also, these ethnic groups/associations served as a springboard for nationalist activities in the country as the first nationalist movement to oppose British colonialism emerged during this period (Adeniji & Ofiwe, 2015, p. 76).

Ethnicity still dominated the political scenario after the 1960 independence in Nigeria. The political parties remained regionally based and when the then leader of the Action Group (AG) Chief Obafemi Awolowo attempted to expand the horizon and reach of the party to a national level, he received opposition from his very own deputy Chief S. L. Akintola who believed that the party should continue to maintain their regional symbol and sustain their grip on the ethnic factor and sentiments (Adeniji & Ofiwe, 2015, p. 76).

Also, Ukiwo (2005, pp. 7-8) believes that the take-over of government by the military after the military coup of 15 January 1966 which brought Major General Aguiyi Ironsi as the new Head of State was ethnically motivated. In the same vein, the military coup of July 1966 was perceived as ethnocide against the Igbo tribe living in the Northern region. Consequently, these two military coups led to the 1967 civil war. Undoubtedly, the second republic was not exonerated from the syndrome of ethnicity, though military reduced ethnic tensions, but it failed to repress ethnic consciousness among the populace (Ukiwo,

2005,p.8).

Another significant event which portrayed ethnicity in Nigeria according to Adeniji and Ofiwe (2015, pp. 76-77) was the annulment of the 1993 general elections by General Babangida in which Chief M. K. O. Abiola was globally believed to have been the winner. This annulment was generally believed and interpreted as a strategic attempt to prevent Yorubas from the corridor of power in Nigeria by the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group. The annulment was greeted by a widespread rage and civil unrest in the Southeast and led to the transfer of power to the interim government of Chief Ernest Shonekan, a Yoruba by tribe.

In recent times, when looking at the political scenario of Nigeria, we can see ethnicity as apparently a negative value, given that it contributes nothing but disunity in diversity as ethnic groups are regarded closer and ethnic interest are an utmost priority over national interest.

### **Negative Impacts of Ethnicity in Nigeria**

There is no doubt about the fact that Nigeria is underdeveloped. Evidence are there for everyone to see. A few years ago, the country cogitated and nursed the idea of becoming one of the 20 largest economies of the world by the year 2020 (Umezina, 2012, pp. 217-220). However, this is just wishful thinking, as this cannot be possible to achieve in the remaining few months to enter the year 2020. Umezina (2012, p. 219) while reiterating the World Bank projection of July 2011, states that the first 20 world largest economies include the following: "United States, China, Japan, Germany, France, United Kingdom, Brazil, Italy, India, Canada, Federation, Spain, Mexico, Korea, Netherlands, Poland,

Turkey, Indonesia, Switzerland, Australia and Russian." The question that stares one at the face is that "which of these countries is Nigeria preparing herself to replace?" A country must put her house in order before engaging on a hard-driving program of becoming one of the 20 largest economies of the world by 2020. The reality is just that this is not possible because the year 2020 is around the corner and this projection was made since 2011, that is, eight years ago. Presently in Nigeria, it is challenging to realize this dream because foreign investments into the country are shrinking fast and the current state of security does not help the matter (Umezina, 2012, p. 220). The investors are being driven away because of the unfriendly and unstable business environment. Nigeria, as a country, has a fundamental problem to grapple with. The problem is none other than the problem of ethnicity. Ethnicity in the opinion of Umezina (2012, p. 221) is "albatross, a cog in the wheel of progress which ought to be solved in order for the country to join the comity of progressive nations." In other words, Nigerians must do away with their differences (be it ethnic, cultural, religious or language) for our country to move forward.

Umezina (2012, pp. 221-224) opines that the present state of ethnic rivalry in Nigeria has made it difficult for Nigeria to produce the right leaders who live above boards, who exhibit impeccable and predictable character, and who are ready to spend themselves for the sustainable development of the entire nation and not just a particular tribe. However, the menace of ethnicity has not allowed such leaders to come on board. It is because the emphasis at every election has not been on the suitable candidates for the election but always on where the

candidates came from. It explains why both State and National Assembly are filled up with many people who are there neither for the interest of the nation nor for their ethnic groups. These people, according to Umezina (2012, p. 221) "shot themselves up into the National Assembly by weeping ethnic or religious sentiments. They described themselves as the best candidates to fight for the rights of their respective ethnic/religious groups. The suitability of their character was hardly called to question, but as soon as they were elected, they went into self-serving." In other words, the ethnic factor is often the ground on which presidents are elected, governors voted, ministers appointed, contracts awarded and even national policies decided. The socio-political belief is that one can only get himself or herself to power at the center through ethnic connections or by fanning the embers of ethnicism. The resultant effect of this is the evolution of various ethnic militias which refers to the extreme form of ethnic agitation for self-determination as various ethnic groups assume militant posture and gradually transform into militia groups with each having its unique problems, plans, strategy, aims/objectives as well as ethnic identity and acts as the agents through which the interests and desires of its people are expressed and sought to be realized.

In the view of Aniagolu (1993, p. 162), another negative consequence of ethnicity which will continue to cripple the development of the country unless the problem of ethnicity is adequately dealt with is the issue of federal character. Federal character is an attempt made to placate various ethnic groups in Nigeria, and it is embedded in the constitution. Aniagolu posits that the reason behind federal character

may appear plausible which is to ensure greater unity of the country, but the underlying politics that gave rise to it allows mediocre in the running of government (Aniagolu, 1993, p. 162). Since merit has not been promoted as a criterion for serving the nation, governance has, therefore, become an all-comers affair in Nigeria. Hence, all manners of people (with political godfathers) have been chosen to hold public offices in which they had neither the training nor the expertise. With this evil being perpetrated, the progress of a nation in all ramifications will remain a mirage because those who are driving her economy are not qualified to do so. It is a grievous condition in which Nigerians find themselves. Indeed, government ministries, parastatals and agencies are now filled-up with unskilled officials. Moreover, since their employment into these offices was not based on merit but rather on tribal affiliation, they could not make any positive contribution in their various offices. Instead, they enjoy spending their time and effort on what they know how to do best, namely, to loot and defraud the nation. Consequently, looting of public funds, misappropriation and all forms of corrupt practices continue despite the zero tolerance of President Buhari led administration for corruption.

Moreover, ethnic rivalry raises its ugly head in 2019 general elections that was just concluded, and which eventually led to the election of some unqualified candidates as members of states house of assembly, governors, senators, and the rest of the government, to defuse ethnic tension. Some political parties adopted the rotational idea of the elected posts among the existing geopolitical zones in their states (Umezina, 2012, p. 221). However, this has the same implication as that of federal

character clause. The basis of election into office going by this arrangement is where one comes from and not on merit. The zoning of the presidency, though unconstitutional has not been easy in this regard. The Hausa/Fulani tribe see themselves as a tribe that is born to rule and so (if possible), they want to occupy the seat of power perpetually even when their consensus candidate lacks the technical know-how and the intellectual capacity that the office demands. It remains a significant threat to the peaceful co-existence of all the major tribes in Nigeria. The variations and hullabalos from various ethnic groups are frustrating the smooth running of government. Going forward, we need to worry more about the leadership recruitment process. It must be possible for Nigerian democracy to accommodate and promote the best, those who are willing to serve, and those who believe in Nigeria and higher causes instead of the ethnically biased people.

Furthermore, Umezinwa (2012, p. 222) posits that ethnic competition in Nigeria also manifests in the formation and configuration of political parties. Most of these parties are formed along the line of a specific tribe. Eventually, they will hijack such a party to serve their interest. According to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), as of February 2019, Nigeria has about 91 registered political parties (Independent National Election Commission, 2019). Most of these parties lack direction as they do not have clear manifestoes. Each party says it will improve power generation, develop roads, raise the quality of life, build hospitals, and indeed all sectors of the economy. However, they will not tell the populace the details of how and where the money will be generated for the execution of these projects. The primary



concern of such parties is their ethnic interests. Undoubtedly, political parties that are formulated along ethnic line/interest will not serve the interest of the populace but a disservice to the nation.

Remarking on the divisive nature of ethnicity, Umezinwa (2012, p. 225) posits that ethnicity does not give room for proper accountability and transparency in governance. For instance, Nigerians find it difficult to call their past presidents and other political office holders to render an account of their administration. A lot of them did great harm to the nation's economy, but no one dares to probe them because they are 'untouchables.' Some of them after leaving office still go about freely and make even seditious and incisive statements unhindered. In fact, if any of them is apprehended and detained for interrogation, their tribe's men will rise in arms to defend these corrupt officers. This factor, therefore, makes it difficult to fight corruption in Nigeria. In the words of Adeyanju (2012, pp. 3-4), this is so "because there is a tradition in Nigeria that forbids citizens from exposing or prosecuting fellow tribesmen for corrupt practices. Corrupt tendencies are exhibited and laws violated, yet such individuals invoke ethnic sentiment to get away from or prevent prosecution."

Furthermore, to secure employment or get a contract in public service is a matter of having one's tribesman in position of authority. Thus, the phrase "it is our turn" which was coined from this practice is a common saying among the tribesmen of the person in position of authority. Consequently, "merit and excellence are sacrificed on the altar of primordial thinking" (Adeyanju, 2012). An adage in Yoruba corroborates this fact. It says *'ara ile mi o seun, eniyan mi ko sunwon, ako*

*ni ft we alaro lasan'* meaning that 'even if your kinsman or tribesman is not performing according to expectation, you can still not compare him/her to somebody from another tribes.' This is simply nothing but sacrificing merit and excellence at the altar of mediocrity. If we continue this way, the desired development will only be a mirage.

Moreover, the incessant political unrest being witnessed in the country is basically because of avoidable conflict between forces of democracy and that of ethnic interests. Adeyanju (2012, p.3) while commenting on these states:

The political power-play in the name of building consensus within political party structures have negatively influenced a tradition or emerging mentality of political office rotation between the North and the South. In fact, an analyst posits that this form the fulcrum of scaling of Boko Haram insurgency. That the ethnic elements in the North felt cheated when the seat of power didn't return to them in 2011 as agreed within the then ruling party.

A fundamental negative effect of ethnicity in Nigeria is a culture of mistrust among various ethnic groups in the country. Due to lack of trust, objective discussion/dialogue on legitimate issues affecting the country such as poverty, insecurity, environmental pollution, and so on are being trivialized as Northern issues, Southern issues or as Western issues (Adeyanju, 2012, p. 3). In this same manner, the issue of the abduction of about three hundred Chibok schoolgirls in April 2014 was politicized and trivialized as Northern issue and so, concerted effort was not made to recover these schoolgirls on time until few months later when complications had set in. Consequently, only few of these girls later gained freedom from their captors.

Currently in Nigeria, many associations are formed along the tribal lines. These include Arewa consultative forum, Afenifere, Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, Odua People's Congress, and so on. Similarly, there are so many fora even among the state governors such as South-Western governors' forum, South-South governors' forum, South East governors' forum, and Northern governors' forum. The primary motive of each of this forum is to gain political advantage over the rest. Hence, the development of Nigeria as a Nation is not as important as the development of various ethnic groups. In the case of Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the aim is completely different which is, total secession from Nigeria as a nation. All these are signals or signs pointing to the devastative effect of ethnicity in Nigeria (Umezina, 2012, p. 221). "With all these groups around, it will be very difficult to organize a popular uprising against the government as witnessed in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, etc." (Umezina, 2012, p. 225).

### **Examining the Context of Paul's Message to Galatians**

According to Howard (1979), what occasioned the penning of the letter to the Galatians was the Judaizing controversy. The Christian community at Galatia was composed mostly of non-Jews who got converted through Paul. They were, however, harassed with a Judea-Christian propaganda that sought to destroy their faith in the gospel of freedom preached by Paul and to win them over to Jewish Law and practices; namely by circumcision. According to Paul, this demand was mere externalism of religion which would impair Christian freedom. In Christ, the faithful at Galatia had received the Holy Spirit without having

to submit to the demands of the law (Gal. 3:2). The Spirit is a Spirit of freedom (Gal. 5:13-16). It confers from the inside freedom of heart that transcends the dictum of the law (Gal. 5: 21-24). It inspires a wholesome response of the child that eliminates the fear of the repulsive attitude of the slave (Gal. 4: 4-7). A return to the law would be like going back into the old order, to past slavery (Gal. 4:31), to the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10-14) and the hopeless bondage of sin (Gal. 3: 21-23). In Christ, the new order of faith has come. We have gained freedom from the clutches of the law. Our freedom is known by the fact that we have 'put on Jesus Christ.' This is the actual position of the Christian condition. It is in this theological architecture that Paul structures the text under study.

### **Background of Paul's teaching**

To have a proper understanding of the chosen text, there is a need to know the religious, social and political background of the text. It is worth noting that the sociological realities of the world in which Paul was raised did not escape him at all. The triple classification Paul cited in Gal. 3:28 correspond to a tripartite division of society in the Graeco-Roman world: ethnoreligious (Jews/Gentiles), socio-political (freeman/slave), sexist (Male/female) and which can mutatis mutandis correspond to structures in our contemporary Nigerian society. Elsewhere in Pauline literature, these analyses of society are given, for example, I Cor. 12: 13: Jews/Greeks; Slaves/freeman Col. 3:11: Jews/Greeks; circumcised/ uncircumcised; barbarian/Scythians; slaves/freeman. Indeed, this dualist perspective of ancient human society, according to Manus (1982) offered Paul sound basis for theologizing on social justice. The later text,

though coming from a deutro-Pauline letter to the Colossians, takes care of the ethnic differences much more than any before it.

Pauline view of society according to Manus (1982, pp. 18-19) is comparable with the idea expressed in the benediction which a pious Jew pronounced daily in the synagogue when he thanked God for not having been created a Gentile, a slave and a woman. Even Rabbinical Judaism, according to Crouch, quoted by Manus (1982, pp. 19) has an incantation identical to the contrasts of Gal. 3: 26 which reads thus: "I call upon heaven and earth as witnesses that the Gentiles as well as the Israelites, Man as well as woman, servant as well as handmaid can come into the possession of the Holy Spirit through a good moral behavior." While in Paul it is not 'moral behavior' but of being in Christ Jesus; nor the 'possession of the Holy Spirit' but the 'oneness of the body' that matter, we submit that those Jewish traditions indicate the background of Paul's thought. Judaism and Graeco-Roman world of his time knew the problem of a divided and oppressive society. In his contribution on a debate on freedom, Paul proclaims that the new Christian vocation cuts at the roots of those divisive forces. Therefore, Paul's point of interest is social, that is an ethical teaching on the way various relationships within the society were to be maintained. Paul confronts the reality of his times by following the set pattern of Jewish analysis of the principles of inequality in human society, namely race, social status and sex. Whereas his fellow Jews contented that the dichotomies in society were divinely designed, Paul questioned the validity of these distinctions and their bearing on the believer "in Christ." Corroborating this view, Wright (2016) states

Paul utterly discarded the ethnic and Torah-based

shape of Judaism in which he had been so deeply involved before his conversion, and to this extent his theology is radical, apocalyptic, innovative, dialectic, and so forth. But all this is held within his conviction that the God whom he now knows in Jesus Christ and the Spirit is the God of Abraham, whose purposes have now taken a decisive turn in which the character of the community as defined by Torah is left behind (not, it should be noted, criticized as theologically repugnant). He tells the story of Abraham, Israel, Moses, Jesus, and himself - Paul himself becomes a character in the narrative, since he is the unique apostle to the Gentiles, a point that is foundational for Galatians - to help his readers, understand where they in turn belong within the same narrative.

According to Manus (1982, pp. 21-23), Paul's challenge to the societal structures of his day is comparable also to the stoic view of freedom. Zeno of Citium ( c. 336-264 8.C.), the stoic founder was opposed to the politics of Aristotle which taught the public the need for a tripartite form of government - the ruling class, the artisans and the auxiliaries (military). On his part, Zeno envisaged a city in which men and women, slaves and masters would be equal and press in a similar fashion, stoicism, for its appeal to equality for all persons became a popular philosophy of the Mediterranean World in the New Testament times. It is not impossible that Paul, the man of Tarsus, a philosophic center of the time, had been deeply influenced by such currents of egalitarian principles. However, a clear difference existed between Paul's thinking and the Greek mind. Pauline unity and equality of persons are not based on "nature" is not a principle of unity but division since it is by "nature" that Gentiles and Jews are what they are. For Paul, unity and equality are not due to a return to nature. Unity and equality are the consequence of

Christ's radical love of humanity and the transvaluation of all that hold humanity in perpetual bondage. Even though Paul was fully abreast with current philosophical trends of his time, he made little use of the concept of nature, and whatever use he made of it at all was unphilosophical. For this defective aspect of nature, Christ came not in the name of nature but according to the saving plan of God to transform the natural order.

Overall, a critical study of Paul's background reveals that Paul's attitude towards social inequalities is not based on ontological speculations on human nature but that his attitude is anchored in Christ. In Christ, Paul discovered an image of once and the great gift of God for all humankind irrespective of tribe, religion, sex or political affiliation. No segregation, no tribalism or unreasonable ethnicity nor inequality can be justified before this 'amazing grace' of God. Aristotelian politics created unequal structured in the name of nature. With nature as its weapon, stoicism castigated Aristotelianism. Paul's thought broke the canons of the time. Instead of floating on such arid speculations, like Judaism, 'Paulinism' took things as they were and saw them unbalanced. In Christ, this imbalance was to be restored. It is why Paul's teaching has stood the test of time, and still has relevance for us set in the sub-region of Africa today where social disparity manifests itself in all shades.

### **Interpretation of Gal. 3:28**

For a holistic understanding of the text, each clause will be treated individually, and references will be made at random to related passages in Paul. The triple repetition of the denial - speech formula *auk eni*, 'there is no' is a *crux interpretum* (Manus, 1982, p. 23). Does Paul negate the existence of a Jew and a Greek, a slave and a freeman, and in

our own country, Nigeria, a Hausa and a Fulani, a Yoruba and an Igbo or an Ibibio and an Efik when one is in Christ? Or does Paul reject the social relationship between a Jew and a Greek, and those existing between various ethnic peoples in a country? In other words, is the statement to be taken literally or unitarily? Is he suggesting the abolition of the distinction between sexes, classes and tribes? Indeed, the difference between man and woman is evident to Paul. Elsewhere in his writings, he argues vehemently about it. The story of Philemon and Onesimus, his teaching on the respective duties of slaves and masters and the tacit admonition of I Cor. 7:21 point strongly to the fact that Paul did not envisage a society without masters and slaves. The Jew/non-Jew dichotomy seems to point to the fact that in the case of opposition between them, Paul strove to efface any difference. The catchword, 'Neither Jew nor Greek' does not mean that Paul was teaching that the disparity between the two nations had been obliterated. Neither one understands the formulation of the principle of human equality anchored on the principle of a tabula rasa. There is no tabula rasa for Israel since they are the elected people of God. Therefore, for Paul *ouk eni* does not imply that the differences were abolished, but the real meaning is at the level of the relationship. Gal. 3:28 is emphasizing person - to person, people-to-people relationships rather than a Unitarian view of the heterogeneous structure of human society.

The third clause ('there is no man and [kai] woman') calls for an exegetical detail because the first two oppositions are formulated with 'nor': 'No Jews nor Greek, slave nor free.' According to Manus (1982, pp. 23-24), the change of connecting particle from *oude* to *kai* suggests an



intentional distinction made by Paul concerning the physical differences between man and woman. According to him, the allusion goes back to Gen. 1:27, where it is stated;

***So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.***

What is stressed in the Yahwist account of creation is not the physical difference between man and woman but their equality as created in the 'image and likeness of God.' It can, therefore, be concluded that Paul depended on the creation story for the construction of the clause. In sum, when Paul says there is neither male nor female, he does not encourage the suppression of the natural difference but that in Christ, the difference is immaterial and irrelevant. It is against the practice of some Christian denominations that subjugate the role and position of women in Church and society.

The last clause, 'you are all one in Christ Jesus' is, as rendered by the RSV ambiguous. It could also be understood in a Unitarian or essentialistic sense, namely that Christians are one entity, that is, one and the same thing in Christ. The gender of heis, 'one' in Greek is masculine. Consequently, it can be rendered 'one person.' The corporate view of Christians in Paul's perspective brings the diversity of peoples, of sex, of tribal, of social and political persuasions to the common belonging to Christ, a belonging which effects oneness with him and with each other - the classical mystical union between Christ and the believers. The perspective is the same as expressed in I Cor. 12:12, namely that the various members make one body, that of Christ. The point of the whole

argument is, precisely, that unity in diversity remains a significant aspect of any nation that will achieve development. In the Church, Paul advocates the manifestation of the variety of charisma for diversity and multiplicity of peoples make for the Church's unity. The coming into being of this one family in which all barriers of tribe, culture and social status are broken down is the wonder which fills Paul's vision.

### **Hermeneutical Implication of Paul's Message in Gal. 3:28 for Contemporary Nigerian Society**

The ultimate objective of biblical interpretation is making it possible for God's people to hear God's word fresh, in idioms which contemporary men and women understand, but which are also faithful to the Biblical witness. Thus, the hermeneutical implications of Paul's attitude towards ethnicity in Gal. 3:28 refer to how we should read and understand the text (Gal. 3:28) in the social location (Nigeria), as characterized by the mission and contextualized exegetical engagement with the people's peculiarities.

Gal. 3: 28 is indeed a radical challenge to Christian conscience. Nanos (1998) posits that within the Israelite community, "whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female, all are one in Christ. Israel and those of the nations who worship her God stand together as one indiscriminate equal within this creation. There is no need to complete in the circumcision of the flesh that which was begun by the Spirit (3:3). Now such a move is unacceptable." We contend that the passage holds several implications quite significant for our contemporary society. The passage passes as an injunction to Christians and non-Christians to sink all differences in the name of Christ. The Jew /Greek contrasts manifest

both tribal - racial as well as political tensions not dissimilar and unknown in our times as members of one body /nation, ethno-tribal, socio-political and even sex differences and discriminations should have no place in our midst. Justice demands that no one group holds power to exploit another. Though not immediately mentioned in the text under study, Paul's cherished concept of the Adelphi, brethren should guide and motivate all our interpersonal relationships and no longer the natural and the ontological basis of our being Hausa or Fulani, Ibo or Yoruba, or others. First and foremost, we are Christians, Nigerians, then Hausa, Yoruba or Ibo, or others. Indeed, for Paul, tribal or racial differences like those of sex are a matter of nature, immutable and irreversible, but in Christ and Christians, the differences are inconsequential. Does this imply a demobilization of the struggle for social transformation? No, not in the least. Doubtlessly Paul was not unaware that overt ethnic chauvinism in matters of religion and politics which live with us today in Nigeria was human-made and can be exaggerated.

As shown in the analysis of the text, context and background, neither does Paul philosophize on the problem of societal differences nor attribute human distinctions to 'nature.' For Paul, 'nature' is sinful but along with biblical thought in general, Paul believes strongly in the divine spark in man. For him, this is the ground for a person to person relationship that should exist between all peoples. What image of Paul do we draw so far from our exposition that can help us in our search for authentic and meaningful co-existence with the other Nigerian? Indeed, Paul is not a revolutionary but a prophet, one is shocked by glaring inequities in human society. He is a Christian who has discovered in

Christ a shining image of unity, love, peace and freedom. His faith in Christ makes him conscious of the distorted character of human relationships. One cannot be 'in Christ' and yet partake in the divisive power game being played today by many of our nationals in the name of tribe and politics. While it may be true that Paul's plea does not go into a program of action, it actively deals with the concrete facts of human society, a predicament which we, with our false notion of values and the *grabist* mentality of our Nigerian lifestyle share the most.

### Conclusion

A text like Gal. 3:28 indeed gives us a revolutionary teaching on social ethics, Paul affirms here that, because of Christ, all men and all women, in other words, all Nigerians irrespective of tribe, creed and party affiliations are entitled to an equal treatment, in ecclesiology as in politics, this statement calls for far-reaching consequences. Few months ahead, this nation would be conducting her general elections for choosing her leaders into various political offices. This occasion should not be turned into a war among various ethnic and political groups at the inspiration of those aspiring to office. Our political atmosphere is already polluted with acts of lawlessness and indecorum judging from events happening all around us and some provocative and sad chauvinistic statements uttered by some of those seeking office. It is a very high time our politicians should address themselves to issues and desist from politics based on ethnic grounds and personalities with all its evils of mudslinging and character assassination reminiscent of the First Republic.

On the whole, we appeal to all Nigerians to desist from discriminatory voting based on ethnic or party grounds which presently characterize our political atmosphere. Instead, all voters should consider factors that are salient to the growth and development of this nation while choosing leaders to fill various political offices for "There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is neither male nor female: for we are all one in Christ Jesus."

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**Hermeneutical Implications of Paul's  
Attitude towards Ethnicity in  
Galatians 3: 28 for Contemporary  
Nigerian Society  
Okunoye J. Oluremi**

**Abstract**

Paul in Galatians 3:28 declared "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." From this text, is Paul advocating a situation in which the difference between Jew and Greek, bond and free would be totally abolished? Was Paul aware of the ugly discrimination in our country arising from overt ethnicity? What would he say in a state like ours where various ethnic groups do their own thing like a state within the state? Using contextualization approach, it is discovered that Paul's plea in Galatians 3:28 can simply be described as an invitation to overlook the apparently unavoidable tribal differences. Thus, tribal consciousness or exaltation of a tribe above others must give way for nationalism. This is with a view to create room for peaceful co-existence and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** *Ethnicity, Nigeria; democracy; Galatians 3:28; St. Paul*

**Introduction**

***"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).***

The above-quoted declaration of Paul in Gal. 3:28 is indeed the hallmark of his theology of liberation and, in fact, the Magna Carta of the abolition of all discriminations among ethnic groups, economic exploitation of the poor by the rich and sexism (Manus, 1982). Now when sober reflections on the political happenings are more than urgent, a