Articles by Rowland C. Edwards

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All One in Christ (June-July 1967)

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In Scripture, do these words express a wish, an aim, an invitation? To whom do they apply? What do they mean?

Galatians 3:28 comprises four positive assertions. In the Revised Version the verse reads:

“There can be neither Jew nor Greek, There can be neither bond nor free, There can be no male and female: For ye are all one man in Christ Jesus.”

The language is not, “You ought to be,” or “I beseech you to be,” or “You may alter your conduct so as to be,” but “Ye are all one man in Christ Jesus.” This is positive, unequivocal. The unity is an accomplished fact.

Let this be grasped, firmly, decisively. Then let us ask whether the expression pertains to practice or position. The four statements must all belong, of course, to the same category, whatever that may be. Take, then, the assertion that there can be no male and female. Is this true of practical living? Would it not be absurd to say so? In this sphere, of course, there must be male and female. Is it not clear, therefore, that the verse cannot apply to practice, experience, walk, testimony? It must, then, be referred to the believer’s standing. Here all distinctions of all kinds are obliterated, not modified or shaded off, or merged, but completely abolished. Here all believers are alike, while as to practice all are different. We must all admit imperfections as to our practice, but, as to standing, God has perfected us for ever (Hebrews 10:14). And perfection admits of no degrees.

The details of the passage, Galatians 3:24 to 4:8, to which the reader is asked now to turn, combine to set forth the believer's standing. Take the justification of 3:24, "that we might be justified by faith." This is what we have, not from men as they see our good works, but from God in His judicial reckoning. All Christians have it alike, without exception.

Consider 3:26, "for ye are all sons of God, by faith, in Christ Jesus." (See Revised Version — "sons" not "children"). Note "all sons": men and women both? Certainly, for "sons" here has to do, not with sex, but status. Consider the bearing on this of certain two passages. The first is Matthew 9:15, which mentions "sons of the bridechamber" (see R.V.), meaning wedding-guests, regardless of sex. The second is Luke 20:34, in which "sons of this age" (R.V.) are said to comprise those who marry, that is, males, and those who are given in marriage, that is, females. These two passages exemplify a figurative use of the word "son" which does not confine it to the male sex.

What is the background of Galatians 3:24 to 4:7?

It was the custom for the Roman boy to go to school for about ten years. When about 17 years old, the father seeing fit to confer it on him, he is given the status of an adult. He is now publicly known as "son," being quite independent of household slaves, whereas previously he has been in the charge of these various "guardians and stewards" (Gal. 4:2). One slave called the "paidagogos" (Greek — the Latin is "paedagogus") had had the duty of taking charge of him to and from school. In 3:4 (A.V.) he is called a "school-master," in R.V. a "tutor," but these are mistranslations, he was neither

tutor nor teacher, but a child-escort or child-leader. Verse 23 characterizes the law of Moses, functioning for a time, not permanently, as a warder, shutting up Israel for protection. Verse 24 features the law as a child-escort, functioning for a time, not permanently. The law was transitory, as shown in these two verses, and preparatory to the advent of the promised Messiah. In Him is finality, not transitoriness: permanence, not what is preparatory. Christ having come, believers now are sons of God, not minors, but adults in status, superior in this respect to Daniel, Isaiah, and other saints under the law, inasmuch as these had not the status of sons. Christ was sent forth by God, the Son by the Father, to give us the place, or status, of sons. ("Adoption of sons" in Gal. 4:5 means "place of sons"). Verse 27 in the English reads as if some of the Galatian Christians had not been baptised. But the original implies they had all been baptised, not to own Moses as leader (this is the significance of the baptism of 1. Cor. 10:2, the reference being to the 603,-550 of Numbers 2:32), but to own Christ as Lord. Belief in Christ is here said to be a putting on of Him. What is the imagery? It is Roman custom again. The change in status from minority to adulthood was accompanied by a change in dress. As a minor the Roman boy wore a toga (the outer garment permitted only to free Roman citizens) made of white wool edged with purple. But on becoming a son, having adulthood conferred on him, he wore the all-white man's garment ("toga virilis" is the Latin name for it). So, says Paul here, to believe in Christ can be regarded as a putting on of Him. Briefly summarizing, let us clearly appreciate that all believers are one in having put on Christ, all believers are one as being justified by faith, all believers are one as being sons of God, all believers

are one as being all in Christ Jesus — all, without exception, are one in a vital accomplished unity.

But we are not all one in Christ Jesus because we have love towards each other, as we should have according to John 13:35, or because we unite to have large and harmonious gatherings, or because we agree to drop all our differences.