

16.12

## **Galatians 3:28 in Roman and Jewish Perspective**

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, “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” (3:28). The radical sense of this proclamation may be set in contrast to more common perspectives regarding race, class, and gender in Paul’s world. Paul was both Jewish and Roman, but what he wrote in Galatians would be striking to either Jewish or Roman audiences.

### ***A Roman Perspective***

Diogenes Laertius says that Socrates, the wisest of the wise, said there were three blessings for which he was grateful to Fortune: “First, that I was born a human being and not one of the brutes; next, that I was born a man and not a woman; third, a Greek and not a barbarian” (*Lives of the Philosophers* 1.33).

It is highly unlikely that Socrates actually said anything of the kind—but the fact that an influential author would put such words on his lips indicates that these three conditions would indeed be considered blessings in Greco-Roman society (at least among the literate Greek men who comprised Laertius’s audience).

### ***A Jewish Perspective***

The Babylonian Talmud contains a story that almost qualifies as a Jewish variation on Laertius's account. Here, it is reported that Rabbi Judah used to say three blessings daily: "Blessed art thou who hast not made me a heathen; Blessed art thou who hast not made me a woman; and Blessed art thou who hast not made me a brutish man."

The story continues by noting that a certain Rabbi Aha b. Jacob overheard his son praying these three blessings and told him to add another: "Blessed art thou who has not made me a slave." His son responded, "And is not that the same as a woman?" The rabbi replied, "A slave is more contemptible" (*Menahoth* 43b).

Of course, Paul was not the only "enlightened thinker" of his day. Other Roman and Jewish leaders were ready to embrace the philosophy encapsulated in Galatians 3:28—at least in theory. History and culture have revealed that even those who profess the inclusive creed must work to discern its practical implications. Many would say that Paul sometimes failed to do so himself.