

# “ONE IN CHRIST”: WHERE THE GENDER BINARY IS TRANSCENDED QUEERING THE GENDER BINARY IN GALATIANS 3:28C “NO MALE AND FEMALE”

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## Resumen

Este artículo desestabiliza la relación binaria entre sexo y género que aparece en Gálatas 3:28 a partir del uso de la crítica *queer*. Algunos investigadores que utilizan la crítica *queer* afirman que la unidad propuesta en Gálatas 3:28 supone reemplazar dos sexos con masculinidad (“en Cristo, un cuerpo masculino”), por lo que el texto no sería un manifiesto de equidad de género como algunas interpretaciones igualitaristas sugieren. Con base en la lectura crítica de Gálatas propuesta por Davina C. López, se argumenta que la unidad hace referencia al Cristo crucificado, que está distante de la masculinidad perfecta, una de las cosas más deseables en la ideología imperial romana. En consecuencia, la unidad se consigue mediante el movimiento hacia lo débil, considerado inferior y crucificado. Esta es la solidaridad conseguida “en Cristo”: un espacio *queer* y liminal en el que las personas buscan diferentes dinámicas de poder, jerarquías y estructuras genéricas de aquellas que predominaban en el Imperio Romano.

**Palabras clave:** Gálatas, crítica *queer*, género, espacio liminal, solidaridad.

## Abstract

This paper aims to destabilize the sex/gender binary in Galatians 3:28 using queer criticisms. Some of the scholars using queer criticisms maintain that the oneness in Gal. 3:28 indicates replacing two sexes with masculinity (“in Christ,” a male body), and it is not a manifesto for gender equality as egalitarian readings suggest. Following Davina Lopez’s empire- and gender-critical reading of Galatians, this paper argues that the oneness is in crucified Christ, who is far from the perfect masculinity, one of the most desirable things in Roman imperial ideology. Thus, this oneness is attained by downward mobility toward the unmanly, inferiorized, crucified figure. It is the solidarity realized “in Christ,” which is queer and liminal space where people seek different power dynamics and the (gender) hierarchy/structure than those of the Roman Empire and constantly struggle to create solidarity among the oppressed.

**Keywords:** Galatians, Queer criticism, Gender, Liminal space, Solidarity.

## Introduction

Gal 3:28c

οὐκ ἐν᾿ ἄρσεν καὶ θήλῃ· <sup>α</sup>πάντες γὰρ ὁμοίως <sup>β</sup>εἰς <sup>γ</sup>ὓστε ἐν Χριστῷ <sup>δ</sup>Ἰησοῦ.

*There is no male and female; for you all are one in Christ Jesus.*

There are a few manuscripts, including Codex Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, which read *ἀπαντες*. It does not make a significant difference, and I choose to follow NA 28.

There are three other readings: *ἐν εστε εν Χριστω, εστε Χριστου, εστε ἐν* (or *εν*) *Χριστου*. The first variant reads *ἐν* (neuter singular) instead of *εἰς* (masculine singular). All three manuscripts that support this reading are from the 9th century and not strong witnesses. The second one has neither masculine or neuter forms of "one" and simply reads "of Christ." It can be translated as "(for you all) belong to Christ." This variant is also supported by only a few manuscripts, but they are strong ones such as papyrus 46 and Alexandrinus. The third reading has *ἐν* (neuter singular) and lacks the preposition *ἐν*.<sup>1</sup> The translation would be "(for you all) are one belong to Christ." It is only supported by the original reading of the Codex Sinaiticus and one Vulgate manuscript

1 NA 28 suggests to read *εν* not *ἐν*: "εν (vel ἐν?)." However, I consider that *ἐν* is more plausible since the preposition is not used with genitive.

(with slight differences). Even though the witnesses for all three variants are not strong enough to choose any of them over the NA28's text, what is relevant to this paper is that there is only one reading which uses *εἰς* in masculine form. It does not necessarily mean that those variants are the outcome of struggles for gender equality (especially when we notice that the similar saying in 3:26 says "*πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε*" with no textual variant and *εἰς* in v. 28 may be merely an alternative to *υἱοὶ* in v. 26). However, with those witnesses of gender-neutral readings, we are allowed to imagine that there were certain people who read "you all are one (neutral) in Christ" as the scriptural text and how it sounded differently from "you all are one (masculine) in Christ." In those variants, I see a possibility for more liberating and justice-oriented interpretations.

## Aim(s) and Methodology

"No male and female." (Gal 3:28). This phrase from Paul's letter to Galatians has been proudly held up by readers of Scripture, including scholars, non-scholars, Christian liberationists, activists, and others, who sought equality and emancipation, especially for women. It has been, and probably still is, a positive, empowering, liberating statement. However, the challenge(s) are, and will continue to be, brought by those who find the gender binary problematic. "No male

and female." Does it mean there is no gender distinction and anyone who identified with any gender identity, including bigender, pangender, genderqueer, etc. is to be treated equally? "No male and female." Does it mean every one of Christ's followers comes to embrace *both* genders in their full spectrums and become "masculifeminine or feminimascupersons"? (Dale B Martin, "The Queer History of Galatians 3:28 'No Male and Female'", 89). Simply put, it is a question about the power that defines who is male, what is maleness, and the boundary and liminality between male and female: No male and female; but *what* is male and *what* is female? and how can we imagine the world beyond the binary?

In this paper, I, as a queer scholar who takes queer approaches to the text, will attempt to destabilize the gender binary in the verse and seek a more liberating and more justice-contributing reading of the verse especially for anyone who struggles with the gender binary. First, after I briefly review queer interpretations of the text, which are not many but diverse, I will pick and take a closer look at two different approaches, one represented by Dale Martin and Jeremy Punt, the other by Davina Lopez. By doing so, I hope to shed light on the significance of queer interpretations and possibilities they present. Second, I attempt to develop Lopez's idea of

Gal 3:28 as a mandate for international solidarity. In the end, as an expansion of Lopez' argument, I will supplement two things overlooked among other queer interpretations.

My primary aim is not to present *the* interpretation or *the* reading, but to name the problem the text and its interpretations have, to destabilize them, to challenge the things taken for granted among them, and find room for further discussion, in which we might find a way to create a better space for the oppressed and the marginalized. Thus, this paper will, intentionally and boldly, be as queer as it can be.

### Setting of the Issue

Though Gal 3:28 has drawn so much attention in the history of interpretation, especially after the rise of the feminist movement in the NT scholarship, not so many works are done from queer perspectives.<sup>2</sup> Among queer interpretations of the verse, some of them directly deal with the third category, i.e., sex/gender (v.28c), while other works focus more on the first (v.28a) to show the possibility of inclusivity for LGBTQ people by paralleling circumcision with

<sup>2</sup> For brief reviews on the history of interpretations, see Martin 1(88-213) especially pp. 209ff for liberationist and feminist interpretations.

heterosexuality.<sup>3</sup> I find it more crucial to wrestle with the gender binary, for it is the norm that dehumanizes certain people, and is the oversimplified category that suppresses the complexity of human beings’ realities.

Out of those, only a few scholars who made significant contributions to queer the binary are well-known and highly active in this field/methodology such as Lopez, Martin, and Punt. Among these three, the latter two point out similar or overlapping issues with the verse, especially about the centrality of masculinity, while Lopez sees the verse (and the entire letter of Galatians) in rather a unique way by analyzing the power structure of the Roman Empire surrounding and embedded in Paul using Empire- and gender-critical lenses. In next section, I first summarize the arguments of Punt and Martin, and then that of Lopez, which is helpful to find a solution to the issue pointed out by Punt and Martin. I will respond to and critique their argument and attempt to develop Lopez’s idea further.

### **Queer Readings on Gal 3:28: Destabilizing the Gender Binary (Jeremy Punt, Dale Martin)**

The most crucial and obvious problem with Gal 3:28c from a queer perspective appears to be the gender binary; “male and female.” Scholars who use queer criticisms see this binary problematic and attempt to pave the way for destabilizing the binary. To question the binary, there seem to be multiple possible ways. One of the frequently asked questions, asked not only by queer scholars but also by feminist scholars seeking liberation and equality for women in this text, is whether Gal 3:28c means to abolish gender distinctions or simply gender inequality.

### **Abolition of Gender Distinction or of Gender Inequality?**

While some scholars argue the verse is to be read as simply (or drastically, so to speak) abolishing the distinction between male and female, more scholars are concerned about its inequality and see the importance of maintaining the distinctness of one’s own sex/gender for the sake of identity.<sup>4</sup> According to the

3 For example, Bohache (2000) and Patrick S. Cheng (2006). Though their contributions to LGBTQ inclusive readings are significant, I do not take their works up in this paper in order to focus on queer readings which challenge the gender binary directly and due to lack of space.

4 Bohache and Hogan read the verse as simply abolishing the distinction: Bohache (233); Pauline Nigh Hogan, (21, 202). Daniel Boyarin takes Gal 3:28-29 as “the baptismal declaration of the new humanity of no difference.” 5, italics by Yasuda). His interpretation is the following “In Christ, that is, in baptism, all the differences that mark off one body from another as Jew or

scholars who take the latter position, e.g., Meeks and Schüssler Fiorenza, what is abolished is, then, the privilege that only those who belong to one side of this gender binary had (and disappointingly still has).<sup>5</sup> Some scholars take it one step further beyond the issue of privilege, by showing concern about human identity. For example, Uzukwu states: "The fact of being one in Christ nullifies every sense of privilege *without at the same time overcoming our specific identities as men or women*. Unity rejects the use of religious, ethnic, social, or sexual differences to exclude some people from the community of the believers" (209, *Italics by Yasuda*). While those scholars read the phrase in an egalitarian way by interpreting the verse either as the eradication of gender distinctions or of privileges, some queer scholars argue the opposite.

### Androcentric Equality: Critiques from Queer Interpretations

Stephen Moore, in his footnote in a chapter about Romans 1:18-32 and homosexuality, shares his "suspicion" about Gal 3:28: "...what Gal. 3:28 implicitly proclaims is the replacement

of two sexes with one gender—masculinity in the theological trapping of 'righteousness,' which every believer, regardless of anatomical makeup, is required to put on" (265, note 94). Even though this is not a citation from his scholarly work on Gal 3:28 but merely from a footnote, his "suspicion" seems to get to the of the arguments by other queer scholars. This elimination of male and female appears to be imagined in androcentric (not humankind-centered but male-centered) ways in the ancient world.

Jeremy Punt, for instance, writes: "rather than extinguishing sex and gender distinctions, Gal 3:28 maintained and even radicalized maleness, indicated by the baptism of also the female into a divine image which was seen as perfect maleness" (154). Likewise, Dale Martin says: "I have argued, for instance, that the historically constructed meaning would be that there is 'no male and *female*' because, in ancient understandings, there was in Christ only male. The inferior female has been swallowed up into the eschatologically perfected male form" (89). What underlies these views is the idea of human androgyny in ancient world. The meaning of androgyny in the ancient world is, as Martin points out, different from today's, and it is understood not in equality of male and female, but in a clear hierarchy of male-top and female-bottom (Martin 83).

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Greek (circumcision considered a 'natural' mark of the Jew!—Romans 2:27), male or female, slave or free, are effaced, for in the Spirit such marks do not exist" (23). However, he is also aware that this abolition of difference can be a "threat:" "The call to human Oneness, while it is a stirring call to equality, constitutes a clear threat as well to Jewish (or any other) difference" (32).

5 See Meeks (203); Schüssler Fiorenza (218).

According to Punt, there are three main “scenarios” which interpret Gal 3:28 based on the idea of androgyny: a single sex model, the so-called androgynous Adam, and the “androgynous image” of “the ideal human” in “Jewish apocalypse” (151-152). Even though they (deceivably) seem to be useful to understand Gal 3:28 in an egalitarian way, all of them are androcentric and hierarchal (male top). The first, a single sex model in the ancient world, explains human sex not in male/female binary but in the model of one male body. There was only one male sex and female were defined as an inferior version of the male. Therefore, “male and female were differences of degree and not of kind, permutations of a single sex” (Punt 151). The androgenous Adam is an idea that the original human being (אָדָם before אָדָם, cf., Gen1:26) was an androgyne, and only after the Creator made the other human being, the one who is later defined as female and called Eve, this original human being became the male Adam.<sup>6</sup> This idea of androgynous Adam cannot be missed since (1) the paired Greek terms in Gal 3:28, ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ, are also used as a pair in LXX Gen 1:27,<sup>7</sup> and (2) Genesis

is the book which Paul cites and refers to many times in his letter to Galatians, especially in chapters 3 and 4 (the stories of Abraham, Sara, and Hagar), which is the direct literal context of the verse of our focus. Here, even though the original human being is considered as neither male nor female, or both male and female (Boyarin 20), androgynous Adam is still androcentric as the male Adam appears to be the core of the original androgyny. The third scenario, the androgynous image of the ideal human being in Jewish apocalypse, shows that there was an eschatological expectation that “human being will be androgynous, since the male/female distinction will have been overcome” (Punt 152). But this unification also occurs only in an androcentric way, by female merging into male.

Especially the third one, the androgynous image of the ideal human being, is crucially relevant to our text, which ends with a line “for you all are one in Christ Jesus.” Here, Christ Jesus is the model of the ideal human being. By being baptized in him, a person can be clothed with him as if Christ Jesus is the robe to cover any humane imperfection.<sup>8</sup> What is covered by this robe is probably not only imperfection, but also any social distinctions; ethnicity, class, and sex/gender. The problem is, however, that this Christ Jesus is a man with

6 Boyarin names the androgynous Adam as “a male-and-female creature.” He says “the peculiar configuration of the biblical story which first describes a male-and-female creature, then gives it the name “man,” and then reinscribes that very ‘man’ as male, when combined with two peculiarly Greek cultural themes, the devaluation of the belated and the obsession with unity, produced the universal male “(20).

7 I will discuss more about this in later section.

8 As is generally admitted, underlying this is a baptismal formula. See J. Louis Martyn (378-379). See also Meeks (180-183).

a male body. Therefore, despite of many defenses to read Gal 3:28 in egalitarian ways, Pauline image of salvific equality between male and female appears to be androcentric and kyriarchal, as Moore suspected.<sup>9</sup> "[I]n order to be 'saved' the woman actually is said to become male, implying the continued inferiority of femaleness in relation to maleness" (Martin 83). But we are to ask if this is the only image that we can find in Gals 3:28 since we certainly want and expect a more liberating reading of the verse. This is where Lopez comes in.

### Gender Binary and/within Roman Empire (Lopez): Roman Empire and Paul through Gender-Critical Lens

Among interpreters who take queer approaches, Lopez presents a unique way to read Gal 3:28 within the context of Roman Empire. She suggests we should re-imagine<sup>10</sup> Paul in the power dynamics of the Empire through empire- and

gender-critical lenses. Before we see her argument on Gal 3:28, I will summarize her view on Paul, Roman Empire, and gender in *Apostle to the Conquered*.

When Lopez uses her gender-critical lens, she does so in order to reveal or analyze the ideology, metanarrative, and power dynamics/structure in which maleness/masculinity is at center and femaleness/femininity is at margins. It is, needless to say, because discourses on gender binary are about power.<sup>11</sup> As Lopez shows in her book, there were various visual images used by the Roman Empire to propagate its firm and glorious dominion over the world.<sup>12</sup> In some of those images, the Roman Empire is personified as a man and the conquered nations as women.<sup>13</sup> The male body symbolizes the oppressor/penetrator who is with the power, dominance, superiority, and so on, while the female body symbolizes the oppressed and penetrated figure who is powerless, submissive, and inferior to the male.

Paul is also analyzed in this masculinity-centered power structure. According to his self-reflection in the

9 It is truly kyriarchal if the equality in baptism and justification/vindication happens only by the inferiors become the superiors (the Gentiles to Jews, the slaves to the free, and female to male) through the liberating faith.

10 Lopez defines imagination as follows: "Imagination serves as a powerful tool, when coming from the marginalized, not only to confront the imaginary [abused for propaganda] as deceptive, dominant, and harmful, but also to identify voices that have been repressed and articulate new discourses and ways of being that overcome its power;" "Imagination arises from a position of hope among the disenfranchised; it is the ability to envision a different world when that task seems overwhelming, implausible, and forbidden" (18).

11 "[...] the binaries are about power, a form of doing politics through language. Binaries create the smallest possible hierarchy of one thing over another. They are not really about two things, but only one" (Riki Wilchins, 43).

12 See for further discussion Lopez (27-49).

13 For example, the Aphrodisias sebasteion relief of Claudius subduing Britannia, which is used as a cover picture for Lopez's monograph.

letter to Galatians (1:13), he used to be a conqueror (i.e., a persecutor of Christ-believing Jews), a powerful and even violent figure, who reflects the ideal image of “manly Roman soldier” or even of the emperor (Lopez 133). He internalized the Roman way of relationship with others and took it for granted to use violence freely to oppress and annihilate (ἐπόρθουν, Gal 1:13) others and even justified his acts with the traditions of his fathers (Gal 1:14) (Lopez 130). When he is “called” (Gal 1:13-17), however, he is “called to consciousness” (Lopez 124) to ally and identify himself with the conquered nations, which are in a weak, feminine, and lower status. Thus, “he models a different kind of consciousness toward and relationship to others” (Lopez 133) and he transforms from the conqueror to “the apostle to the conquered.” Furthermore, this transformation from conquering Roman-type male to defeated male goes further to let Paul see himself as a mother in birth pains (4:19) Lopez boldly uses she/her/hers pronoun for Paul, with quotation marks (i.e., “she,” “her”) or with slash (i.e., s/he, his/her), when she discusses about “her” maternal self-image (142-143).

### Gal 3:28 as a Mandate to Live in Solidarity

Just as Lopez’s re-imagination of Paul is unique, her perspective on Gal 3:28 seen through empire-critical and

gender-critical lenses is also new. According to her, Gal 3:26-28 “is not a neutralizer of identity constructs or a call for equality, nor is it necessarily modeling nostalgia for primordial oneness; is a *mandate* for dominated groups to work together across their differences in the face of larger structural dynamics of oppression” (238, note 104, Italics by Yasuda). This view becomes clear when we see the verse with gender-critical lens, and here I show how it makes sense.

As I summarized above, the hierarchical dichotomy of the empire/nations, i.e., the dichotomy of masculinity/femininity, is fundamental in Lopez’ argument. It is also the case in her interpretation of Gal 3:28.

What if we were to begin to see Gal 3:28 as part of Paul’s broader argument for a transformed consciousness and solidarity among the defeated? In a Roman imperial ideology concerning the fate of all the nations, conquest and enslavement of all those presumed naturally inferior to the Romans includes, and even creates and manages to some extent, the categories Paul mentions here. Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female—all are one under the banner of the emperor, through his violent peacemaking process (150).

Therefore, despite the reality that nations clash with one another,



people are to realize that true conflict is between the Roman Empire and the nations. Conflicts among nations are generated by the Roman imperial system and ideology (metanarrative), which makes the nations opposed to and compete with one another so that the empire rules over them easily; *divide et impera*.<sup>14</sup> Nations were urged to take "upward mobility"<sup>15</sup> which means to be ahead of other nations, be like the Romans (assimilation). However, the conquered are called to live out a new way of relationship with others, just as Paul became a model for them by taking downward mobility and identifying himself with feminized/conquered others. The nations build solidarity among themselves as children of the God of Israel and co-heirs of the promise, and this solidarity makes them a new creation (6:15).

This new way of relationship, which is named as "inter-national solidarity" by Lopez (146), constructs an alternative structure. It is alternative to the Roman structure since, even though the nations in solidarity still holds the lower/feminine position in the Roman structure from the Roman point of view, there is no hierarchical structure centering oppressive

masculinity inside the realm of international solidarity. This new reality transcends the Roman metanarrative and, unexpectedly and undesirably for the Romans, the nations confront the conqueror all together in unity. It is transcendence of the existing ideology since it would never happen if the nations were captured and blinded by it. Lopez calls it "gender transgression":

The care the Romans take to represent real men as stable, virile, and free, and the nations as penetrated women enslaved to their conquerors, is challenged by this statement [Gal 3:28]. Oneness in Christ and the one God of Israel is a unification of defeated nations from below in defiance of Roman imperial ideology consolidating the whole world, composed of all the nations, as one under Roman law and hierarchy. Paul presents this oneness as gender transgression and solidarity that destabilizes racial, gender, and cosmic order (152).

Since she does not give us further argument on how the oneness is gender transgression, that is, "queer" in a sense, I will investigate how this idea is queer later.

As we saw, the gender-critical lens shows us that the conquered nations are to realize that the true conflict is against the Roman Empire and that they have to unite in opposition to the harmful structures of the superior,

14 See for more discussion on this Lopez's chapter 3 "The Fate of the Nations and the Naturalization of Conquest," pp. 56-118.

15 A phrase which means "moving ahead of and above his [Paul's] contemporaries" (Lopez 129).

masculine, and violent dominator subjugating the inferior, feminine, and powerless dominated people. In order to achieve solidarity, they must overcome the conflicts generated from the social differences such as ethnicity, class, and gender. In other words, they have to be one in Christ, instead of one under the emperor, regardless of their difference. Thus, Gal 3:28 functions as mandate to live in solidarity.

### Oneness Not in Masculinity

Lopez’s concept of international solidarity ordered in Gal 3:26-28 can be used to solve the dilemma pointed out by other queer interpretations that the oneness/equality of male and female only can happen when female merges into male or becomes male. As Lopez argues, the oneness is not achieved by “upward mobility,” i.e., attaining the masculinity by assimilation to Romans (manly men). Another example of oneness through upward mobility is found in upholding alternative (and superior) masculinity in competition with hegemonic masculinity.<sup>16</sup>

16 For example, in the Greco-Roman world, masculinity was involved with virtues such as self-control and it was supposed to be reflected on male bodies, including genitalia. As circumcised male genitalia were not regarded as ideal, if not shameful, in Roman values, it was important for Jews to build an argument for how circumcised male genitalia also reflect virtues and masculinity. See Karin Neutel and Matthew Anderson (2014). On hegemonic masculinity, see R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt (2005).

On the contrary, it is achieved only by remaining at the bottom. She clearly says that the model Paul showed to the defeated nations to live in solidarity is “not the story of upward mobility characterized by becoming real men in Christ,” (141), but rather a way achieved only by downward mobility, even to the extent of identifying oneself as female. If the image of Christ was as a glorious masculine conqueror like a Roman soldier, the alternative structure was merely following the Roman ideology by replacing Caesar with Christ only to maintain the oppressive structure. However, the image of Christ in Galatians is far from glory, masculinity, and conquest. Rather, Christ is portrayed as a crucified, defeated, unmanly figure. I will argue in the following section how this crucified Christ is crucial to our queer interpretation of “in Christ” in Gal 3:28.

### Queer and Liminal Space; “In Christ”

Lopez’s concept of international solidarity can be developed further. I suggest we understand the idea as a queer and liminal space; “in Christ” (read as if it is a name of a place) First, I discuss what kind of power dynamics/gender structure is revealed through the image of a crucified Christ, which seems to be the only image Paul portrays in Galatians (Gal 3:1; 6:14), and which Lopez does not fully analyze in

her book. Then I discuss about the queerness and liminality of the space.

### Power Dynamics Revealed in Crucified Christ

The crucified Christ is, as I pointed out above, the image farthest from the picture of the Roman ideal man. Needless to say, that the crucified man has a male body does not simply define whether he is male or masculine; because what discourses on gender question is less about our biological sex or "essential" traits of each sex/gender but more about power structure and the (ab)use of gender in power dynamics.<sup>17</sup> Hence, this man on the cross has nothing masculine in terms of power. However, this figure needs closer attention and inspection since he gained not a few followers and Paul uses him as a banner for the nations to gather around despite the fact that the crucified man was meant to be unmanly, and thus, undesirable.

First, Christ having a male body has a certain impact on power dynamics, though it has nothing to do with oppressive masculinity. Because it is a male body that was defeated by the forces of empire, it could be more shameful than a female body being defeated and therefore it disrupts the

"natural" order of gender. Thus, we could say that what is crucified on the cross was the oppressive maleness symbolized by the male body, by paraphrasing Gal 5:24 "those who are of Christ have crucified the flesh with the passions and the desires."

Second, the crucifixion itself symbolizes the oppressive structure of the empire. It is about who has power (who is masculine dominator) and who does not. It "was an institution of humiliation, torture, and execution designed to deal with the people considered most threatening to the establishment and its interests [... and] to strike fear into the hearts of any who would dare pose a threat to status quo" (Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 86). Roman citizens were not crucified as much as non-Romans were since it was too shameful (Hanson and Oakman, 87), and thus, it was "also a core image of divinely ordained Roman domination over all the nations" (Lopez, 135). Thus, it is a performance to let people know who has *divine* power. Nevertheless, the crucified Christ turns out to be where different kinds of power lie or come from. It is a power which is from below, resists and subverts the oppressive structure, connects people with one another, and empowers those who were trampled down. This non-masculine power, which itself is a contradictory concept, destabilizes

17 Wilchins describes that the knowledge and language of gender belong not to science but to politics (35-37).

the very notion of masculinity, and where masculinity (i.e., dominance) is shaken, the binary it consists also is destabilized. Since the binary is actually not about two counterparts but about one (e.g., gender binary is about man, white/black race binary is about white), to destabilize the defining one (e.g., male, white, etc.) means to destabilize the binary itself.<sup>18</sup> It is a queer power since it does not work in the structure but creates an alternative space in which the power structure is different from outside. Subverting the power structure by subverting the binary that is constructed to be used for oppression may be achieved by queer power as long as "queer" is more about *what is possible* than about *what it is*.<sup>19</sup>

The cross of Christ, while presenting alternative powers and structures, also functions as an accuser against the Roman imperial system and its injustice. Through it, people gain a bird's-eye view over the Roman ideology and become able to know that solidarity with one another is more significant than competing among themselves.

### In Christ" in Galatians

Though I recognize the importance of "in Christ (ἐν χριστῷ)" in Pauline letters, there is not enough space in this paper to discuss its

meaning and use fully in Galatians. In this section, I briefly show how the uses of this phrase are relevant to our interpretation of "in Christ" as a space which is built not on Roman power structure but on inter-national solidarity. In Galatians, the prepositional phrase occurs six times (1:22; 2:4, 17; 3:14, 26, 28). Except in 2:17, its meaning seems clear: it is the condition/situation in which people have freedom (2:4) and are all one as children/heirs of the blessing and the promise given originally to Abraham and now to people who share the faith with Christ (especially in 3:14, 26, 28). This freedom, in my queer interpretation, is a freedom from the "upward mobility" for justification and/or self-affirmation since to require circumcision from gentiles is to force them to assimilate with Jews. Hence, it is a freedom from Roman ideology which compels people to compete with one another. In Christ, they are free from the oppression the competitive society brings. "In Christ" in 2:17 is less straightforward. Here, I want to simply point out that what is at stake in its context (2:16-21) is if circumcision is necessary for justification or not and Paul is suggesting the alternative way of "seeking justification" which is "in Christ." It is a way of living totally opposite from what the empire promotes.

<sup>18</sup> See Wilchins (43-44).

<sup>19</sup> See Lopez (14).

## Queerness and Liminality of the Space "In Christ"

People of the nations, who came to notice how harmful the empire's abuse of power is and where the true conflict lies, gather together and start to live with mutual support. This phenomenon did not immediately change or take over the world. Rather, it would have happened gradually in small groups of people, such as communities around synagogue where Christ-following Jews and Gentiles attracted by Jewish way of living gathered. It started as a queer and liminal space because of its own nature.

The space is queer in a sense not only that it is unique but also that there is no gender binary inside. As I clarified already, inside this space, people are to resist the oppressive power dynamics, which is symbolized in the gender binary; masculine conqueror dominate the feminine conquered. In this space, the maleness is deconstructed through the image of crucified Christ and the model Paul shows by his new way of living. It is where the harmful masculinity has no room, and therefore, its counterpart also does not exist.

The space is liminal because it does not fall into any category which existing structures offer. Rather, it is a totally new world and it does not have "citizenship" in the existing world yet.

It certainly exists but only between the boundaries of the existing categories of other spaces/communities, and in that sense, it does not *officially* exist. It is outside of *the* structure, and its alternative structure is not yet fully achieved to the degree that it can subvert the larger structure of the empire. In other words, it is a liminal space where the imagination of subversion and transformation is already started to take a shape in the real world, but not yet fully. Here, I am talking about its liminality not only in space but also in time.

This new alternative structure of mutual support could be *the* structure someday somehow. However, there is always a risk that once a structure, i.e., a way of activating power, becomes dominant in the world, it can start othering and marginalizing certain people who cannot fit in the structure or who feel repressed by the structure. Thus, this liminal, and therefore, eschatological space<sup>20</sup> is supposed to remain queer and liminal. It is a requirement for this trying-to-be-gender-neutral space to remain liminal as long as it seeks to be the resistance against the existing structures and categories, i.e., constant struggle to escape from the dominators' gaze which dominates people as others and dehumanizes them.

<sup>20</sup> For the ideas of spacial eschatology and liminality as eschatological, see Westhelle (2012).

It is obvious that constantly creating a space where the power dynamics is different from the outside world is difficult. Paul’s letter itself proves that he struggled to persuade the Galatians to create new way of relationships with one another, which does not allow anyone/any group of people to be dominant over (an)others. There was a certain conflict about circumcision, that is, a conflict concerning boundary of identities and who is superior to others. We actually do not know if he achieved his ambition to create a space/community of mutual support and solidarity in Galatia. It would be imaginable that there remained constant conflicts among one another in churches/assemblies, and therefore, also constant struggles for building solidarity. This may sound as if Paul failed. However, I consider such instability and continuing struggle as marks of living in liminal/eschatological space(s), in which Christ’s followers are called to live.

**Supplement from Queer Critique:  
“No Male and Female” in Its Literal  
Context**

In this supplemental section, I want to present two additional critiques from queer perspectives. In Gal 3:28, there are three sets of social status categories: Jews/Greeks, free/slaves, and male/female. Though they can be named as “race, class, and gender”

(the *troublesome* trinity) which we are almost obliged to mention in today’s discourses regarding power dynamics/structure, Paul may not have used them out of the social expectations/pressure not to miss any category out of the three. Concerning the dichotomies of Jews/Greeks and free/slaves, it is easier to understand why they matter since Paul argues about unnecessary of circumcision (2:3-4, 14, 16; 5:2-6), which had been the boundary marker between Jews and others, and about how those who share the faith of Christ are free men, not slaves, in his letter (4:30-5:1). However, it seems less obvious why “male and female” matters since there is no explicit argument about it. Even the simple fact that ἄρσεν and θήλυ only appears in 3:28 while Ἰουδαῖος (2:13), Ἕλληνας (2:3), δοῦλος (4:1,7), and ἐλεύθερος (4:22,26,30) appears more than once in the letter may indicate something about the unnaturalness of its use.

**Male/Female and Inheritance**

I argue there are two core issues embedded in this pair in the letter. One is (new) creation (cf. 6:15) and the other is inheritance. I start with inheritance. Inheritance is a key issue in the letter of Galatians. As the letter is often summarized as the argument about the dichotomy of circumcision (the work of the law)/faith, the circumcision is a central issue because,

for Paul, it defines who can inherit the blessing of God and receive the holy spirit. When it comes to who can be the heir, all three categories in 3:28 matters. In Jewish tradition, it is Jewish sons, not gentiles nor slaves nor females. Therefore, what Paul declares in 3:28 is that those social distinctions do not determine who can be the heirs, but only one criterion does: being baptized (and dressed) in Christ (3:26-27). Now the adoption is possible since the law functions in different way than defining who can be the heirs (4:5. Cf., 3:23-25). What is deconstructed here? Some scholars see, as I described above, it abolishes the social distinctions *per se*, while others see what is abolished is the privileges the distinctions generate. I consider it is the naturalness, the taken-for-granted, of the *essential* factors, which was defined by the law, to become heirs that is deconstructed here. What was supposed to be essential is revealed as merely a construct, as Paul argues, when the faith of Christ arrives.

Furthermore, once the conditions for becoming heirs are deconstructed, the *natural* way of forming group of people is also destabilized. As the issue of circumcision is the issue of boundary of certain group of people, what is at stake in the Galatian community is conflicts over boundaries. Before Christ, the boundary of Jews/others, i.e., who are the people of the God

of Israel and who are not, was maintained mainly according to their ethnicity. This ethnicity can be regarded as the extension of tribes and households/families. It is a group formed in patrilineal way, whose center is reproduction. Therefore, to destabilize the conditions of inheritance, i.e., the conditions for forming an ethnicity-centered group, is to destabilize the reproduction centered way of group formation (we can see the Christ centered new form of household here).

### Male/Female and New Creation

The other issue embedded in the male/female pair is the (new) creation. As I mentioned above, the phrase ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ appears only once in Galatians and actually even in the entire Pauline letters, and it is difficult to know what underlies this pair since we cannot compare this phrase with other usages. In order to see it, the LXX helps.<sup>21</sup> The phrase ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ occurs eight times in the LXX and all of them are in Genesis (1:27; 5:2; 6:19, 20; 7:2, 3, 9, 16); two of them refer to human being, other six usages refer to animals in the story of the ark of Noah. The first creation narrative describes that humankind was created in a pair

21 ἄρσεν and θῆλυς are used together in Rom 1:27, where Paul disputes about unnatural intercourse. Since they are not in the exact pair and the contexts of Romans and Galatians are totally different, I consider it not helpful to use Rom 1:27 in comparison with Gal 3:28.

of male and female (Gen 1:27, cf., 5:2) and Noah’s story also tells that animals were brought into the ark in pairs. It portrays the image that every species consists of one union of two sexes and there is no other way that any kind of creatures can exist or reproduce.

However, what is declared in Gal 3:28 seems to let us allow to imagine new way of existence: “no male and female.” It is the “new creation” (καινή κτίσις 6:15) in Christ that is contrasted to the (old) creation bound by the social distinctions (particularly circumcision or uncircumcision in 6:15). Though the term κτίσις or κτίζω is not used in the creation story in Genesis, Gospel traditions show there is a connection between κτίσις and ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ. The Gospel of Mark says “from the beginning of creation (κτίσεως), he made (ἐποίησεν) them male and female (ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ)” (Mk 10:6) and the parallel passage in Matthew says “from the beginning the one who create (ὁ κτίσας) made (ἐποίησεν) them male and female (ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ)” (Mt 19:4). Hence, the creation from the beginning (the old creation) was based on male/female set but in the new creation there is no male and female.

This new creation does not need male and female as a pair since the only element that consists, generates, and characterizes it is “being in Christ,” “wearing Christ,” i.e., “being

baptized in Christ.” Here, again, not only the reproduction centered way of being/existence is destabilized, but so also is the sex/gender as a foundation of living creature. It does not necessarily mean that the distinction of male and female disappears, but at least the male/female binary cannot be taken for granted any longer to be the basis of humankind as new creation.

## Conclusion

Gender matters if its categories are classified to superior gender(s) and inferior one(s), and used to oppress, exclude, and dehumanize certain people. As Lopez’s Paul models a new way of relationship in which oppressive Roman masculinity has no room, and consequently, the gendered power structure, we also have to be aware of how gender can function in harmful way and how can we resist against the oppressive structure. At the same time, we are to recognize that the gender/power-neutral space, i.e., safe space, is almost merely an illusion of utopia, and that what is required is not to merely create and secure the “safe space” but to struggle constantly and never-endingly to make a space safe for struggling equally.

Once we understand our task in this way, it could overwhelm us. It seems almost implausible. Nevertheless, we should not be overwhelmed, for



we have Gal 3:28. It is a guide which shows us a preferable future, allows us to imagine something beyond this world, and helps our imagination take a specific shape. Moreover, this verse, or the interpretations of the verse, reveals to us we are not the only one who fight against oppression. When we read the verse with our deep desire for liberation, equality, and justice, we also hear the resonance of people's shouts demanding them in the verse itself and also in the history of its interpretation. Egalitarian readings of the verse presented by feminist scholars are the reflection of their painful fight against the male-supremacy. Critiques against those feminist interpretations from queer readers are also the reflection of desire to see and accept the complexity beyond male vs. female and to imagine a better world for queer people. With all those echoes from history of the resistance and struggle, we are invited to imagine what kind of a better world we need and want for the oppressed, for the marginalized, and for our beloved ones in suffering, through Gal 3:28.

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