

claim? Why must my position dictate my significance? The world may reason that way. But doesn't the gospel teach us that our glory, our worth, is measured by our personal conformity to Christ?³⁹ Or have we lost confidence in the gospel's perspective on reality? The absurdity of feminism lies in its irrational demand that a woman cannot be "a serious person" unless she occupies a position of headship.

Fortunately, this type of reasoning has already been put to the test in real life, so we can see its practical consequences. Look at the world. Is it any wonder that we see all around us a mass stampede for power, recognition, status, prestige, and so on? But the world's reasoning is invalid. Authority does not authenticate my person. Authority is not a privilege to be exploited to build up my ego. Authority is a responsibility to be borne for the benefit of others without regard for oneself. This alone is the Christian view.

Ironically, feminism shares the very premise upon which male domination is founded, namely, that my personal significance is measured according to my rung on the ladder, and my opportunity for personal fulfillment enlarges or contracts according to my role. By this line of reasoning, the goal of life degenerates into competition for power, and no one hungers and thirsts for true fulfillment in righteousness. No wonder both male domination and feminism are tearing people apart!

I appeal to my readers in the name of God, I appeal to you on the ground of Genesis 1-3, to reconsider rationally the basis of your personal significance. Your glory is found only in the image of God within you, as you resemble His holy character, whatever niche you may occupy in His larger scheme of things.

Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus

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This chapter has two goals: (1) to show that Jesus placed a high value on women, and (2) to show that Jesus recognized role distinctions for men and women. Jesus' high regard for women is seen in how He recognized their intrinsic equality with men, in how He ministered to women, and in the dignity He accorded to women during his ministry. Jesus' recognition of role distinctions for men and women is demonstrated by His choosing only men to serve as His apostles with their primary tasks of preaching, teaching, and governing. Women, however, served in other important capacities, such as praying, providing financial assistance, ministering to physical needs, voicing their theological understanding, and witnessing to the resurrection.

Some may question whether Jesus' teaching and practice regarding the status of women harmonize with the rest of Biblical truth. Was His teaching radically different from Old Testament revelation? Are Jesus and Paul contradictory? Is a wife's submission to her husband a one-way street, or are there mutual aspects involved in the teaching about submission?¹

Different positions have been taken relative to these questions, ranging from that of radical feminists² to more traditional evangelical views. The evangelical community seeks to interpret the text as inspired and authoritative. Such is the case with a number of evangelical feminists who are discarding the more traditional viewpoints.³ For Hull, Bilezikian, and others, sex roles are essentially unimportant. They see no "subordination of women to men" in home, church, or society, but rather a "mutual submission and therefore equal opportunity for men and women to serve in both church and society."⁴ Equal opportunity to serve as an ordained elder, bishop, pastor, or teacher is one of their primary concerns.

One starting place for the evidence in the New Testament is to examine the position of women in the life and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. The evidence in the four Gospels demonstrates that our Lord placed a high value on women, while He continued to recognize role distinctions for men and women.

I. Christ Placed a High Value on Women.

The place of women in the first-century Roman world and in Judaism has been

well-documented and set forth in several recent books.⁵ Most frequently, women were regarded as second-class citizens. Even the Old Testament presents situations where women were depersonalized. But such indications do not equal endorsement. God never authorized or approved behavior that depersonalized women. There are other things recorded in Scripture such as child sacrifice, polygamy, ritualistic sex in religion, and wife abuse that have never been sanctioned by God.

The cultural mores and the historical setting into which God spoke His revelation must be distinguished from that revelation itself. Only God's Word is inspired, not human folkways and customs.⁶ Moreover, later cultural developments and deviations from God's truth must not be confused with revelation from God.

Jesus' regard for women was much different from that of His contemporaries. Evans terms Jesus' approach to women as "revolutionary" for His era.⁷ But was His treatment of women out of character with Old Testament revelation, or with later New Testament practice? Other chapters in this volume will show that it was not.

A. Jesus Demonstrated the High Value He Placed on Women by Recognizing Their Intrinsic Value as Persons.

For Christ, women have an intrinsic value equal to that of men. Jesus said, "... at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female'" (Matthew 19:4; cf. Genesis 1:27). Women are created in the image of God just as men are. Like men, they have self-awareness, personal freedom, a measure of self-determination, and personal responsibility for their actions.

Scanzoni and Hardesty point out that "Jesus came to earth not primarily as a male but as a person. He treated women not primarily as females but as human beings."⁸ Jesus recognized women as fellow human beings. Disciples come in two sexes, male and female. Females are seen by Jesus as genuine persons, not simply as the objects of male desire.⁹ Hurley believes "the foundation-stone of Jesus' attitude toward women was his vision of them as *persons* to whom and for whom he had come. He did not perceive them primarily in terms of their sex, age or marital status; he seems to have considered them in terms of their relation (or lack of one) to God."¹⁰

Examples of this even-handed treatment of women by Jesus are found in the four Gospels. First, Jesus regularly addressed women directly while in public. This was unusual for a man to do (John 4:27). The disciples were amazed to see Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar (John 4:7-26). He also spoke freely with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:10-11).¹¹ Luke, who gives ample attention to women in his Gospel, notes that Jesus spoke publicly with the widow of Nain (Luke 7:12-13), the woman with the bleeding disorder (Luke 8:48; cf. Matthew 9:22; Mark 5:34), and a woman who called to Him from a crowd (Luke 11:27-28). Similarly, Jesus addressed a woman bent over for eighteen years (Luke 13:12) and a group of women on the route to the cross (Luke 23:27-31).

A second aspect of Jesus' regard for the full intrinsic value of women is seen in *how* He spoke to the women He addressed. He spoke in a thoughtful, caring manner. Each synoptic writer records Jesus addressing the woman with the bleeding disorder tenderly as "daughter" (references above) and referring to the bent woman as a "daughter of Abraham" (Luke 13:16). Bloesch infers that "Jesus

called the Jewish women 'daughters of Abraham' (Luke 13:16), thereby accord- ing them a spiritual status equal to that of men."¹²

Third, Jesus did not gloss over sin in the lives of the women He met. He held women personally responsible for their own sin as seen in His dealings with the woman at the well (John 4:16-18), the woman taken in adultery (John 8:10-11), and the sinful woman who anointed His feet (Luke 7:44-50). Their sin was not condoned, but confronted. Each had the personal freedom and a measure of self-determination to deal with the issues of sin, repentance, and forgiveness.

Jesus' regard for the intrinsic equality of women and men is also exhibited in his view of divorce and lust. In His treatment of divorce (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18), Jesus clearly regards women not as property but as persons. They have legitimate rights and should be respected. Evans succinctly notes, "Women are not objects to be dismissed at will."¹³

Jesus' condemnation of the sin of lust was crucial in allowing Him and His followers to enjoy social contact as male and female, something nearly foreign to the Jewish mores of His age. Jesus said that "anyone who look sat a woman lust- fully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Why not separate men and women to avoid temptation as the rabbis practiced? Because Jesus came to seek and to save, to teach and to reach (Luke 19:10). That included women as well as men. Jesus' disciples were to have a righteousness that "surpasses that of the Pharisees" (Matthew 5:20).

Jesus "called upon his disciples to discipline their thoughts rather than to avoid women."¹⁴ Lust does not have to be fed but can be controlled. Jesus demanded such control from His disciples, allowing males and females to asso- ciate together and to work in harmony with one another. Although such social contact between the sexes would be unthinkable to first-century rabbis, Jesus' teaching about the sinfulness of lust helps to explain the relationship men and women sustain both in His earthly ministry and in the apostolic church.¹⁵ In the early church, women frequently labored together with men (Acts 16:14-15; Romans 16:3, 12; Philippians 4:3).

B. Jesus Demonstrated the High Value He Placed on Women by Ministering to Women.

Another way in which Jesus showed the high value He placed on women was in ministering to them in a vital and practical manner—both physically and spiritu- ally. Numerous healings and the casting out of demons from women display Jesus' care and concern for women. Several such incidents are only briefly recorded. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and allowed her in return to minis- ter to Him (Mark 1:30-31; Matthew 8:14-15; Luke 4:38-39). Jesus also was con- cerned for a widow in Nain (Luke 7:11-15). He met her as she was weeping just before burying her only son. With compassion, He spoke to her and raised her son to life. Later, Christ healed a woman who was hopelessly bent over for eigh- teen years (Luke 13:10-17). Courageously, on the sabbath and inside the syna- gogue before hostile religious leaders, Jesus helped and defended this poor woman. He spoke to her, tenderly placed His hands on her, and caused her to stand erect, for which she glorified God. He then acknowledged her equal stand- ing with men in Israel's religious heritage by referring to her as a daughter of Abraham (cf. John 8:33, 39).

Mentioned in all three Synoptic Gospels are two additional interwoven sto-

ries. Illustrating great faith while breaking religious and social customs, a poor woman, rendered ceremonially unclean for twelve years by a bleeding disorder, touched Jesus in a large crowd (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48). Instead of rebuking her, Jesus addressed her tenderly as "daughter," publicly strengthened her faith, and bid her go in God's peace.¹⁶ Jesus then proceeded to the house of Jairus, who, with his wife, had just lost a twelve-year-old daughter. In addition to being rendered ceremonially unclean by the woman's touch in the crowd (Leviticus 15:19-22), Jesus also touched the dead girl and restored her to her parents (Matthew 9:23-25; Mark 5:35-43; Luke 8:49-56). Jesus' ministry to needy and hurting women is clearly seen in these events. From the bottom of the social order to the top (the girl's father was a ruler of the synagogue), Jesus aided women just as He did men.

Another woman, a foreigner, a Canaanite of Syrophenicia, whose daughter was demon-possessed, asked Jesus' help (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). She was persistent, intelligent, and witty, and exemplified *great faith*, a phrase elsewhere applied only to a centurion (Matthew 8:10; Luke 7:9). In rabbinic writings women are seldom presented positively and rarely illustrate faith or theological acumen.¹⁷ But Jesus used her as an illustration of His previous teaching about defilement (Matthew 15:10-20; Mark 7:14-23). Jesus' disciples considered this Gentile woman unclean (cf. Acts 10:28). Jesus tested her spiritual tenacity, enlarged her understanding of spiritual truth, then granted her request, complimenting her for her faith.

The fourth Gospel records Jesus' concern for His mother's welfare as voiced in His dying words to John (19:26-27). Jesus wanted His mother to be cared for properly after His death.

Besides ministering to physical needs, Jesus dealt with women spiritually. The foremost example of this is found in John 4. Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman as an individual and met her specific needs. Jesus apparently showed her the same attention, care and interest He showed to men. In fact, an interesting contrast is evident between Nicodemus (chapter 3) and the Samaritan woman (chapter 4). He was secretive; she was open. He doubted; she accepted. Jesus also taught her specific religious truths about God, worship, and the Messiah. As great as these particulars are, some feminists have exaggerated the details and surmised additional concepts to enhance the role of women.¹⁸ However, three aspects of this occasion do stand out. (1) Jesus spoke to a *woman* (v. 27), which amazed the disciples. (2) She was a Samaritan (v. 9). (3) He taught her religious truth in contrast to the current rabbinic practices. This point is more fully developed in a later section of this chapter. Two other passages (John 7:53-8:11 and Luke 7:37-50), commented on above, show Christ meeting similar spiritual needs in other women.

Two additional incidents deserve mention. On one occasion a woman spoke up from the crowd saying how blessed Jesus' mother was to bear and nurse Him (Luke 11:27-28). Jesus did two important things. He gave her His undivided attention by listening to her comment, and He mildly corrected her and pointed her toward further spiritual understanding. He said that hearing and keeping the Word of God are the primary spiritual tasks. Jesus does not deny His mother's place of importance, but goes beyond it to a wider spiritual truth.

An additional story concerns Salome, Zebedee's wife (cf. Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1), ambitiously seeking positions of utmost power and honor for

her two sons, James and John. She seems to have "worshiped" with a selfish motive (Matthew 20:20-22). This incident comes only shortly after Jesus' promise of thrones to the twelve (Matthew 19:28). In fact, the disciples "thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once" (Luke 19:11). They were anxious to secure their positions of authority. James and John may have asked through their mother, not desiring a further rebuke from Christ for seeking preeminence (Mark 9:34-37; Luke 9:46-48). Again, Jesus' mild rebuff is turned into a spiritual lesson on humility and self-sacrifice. Jesus was consistently willing to dialogue and interact with women.

Thus, Jesus showed how highly He valued women by ministering to them and meeting their needs—even the need to be heard. He healed women, dialogued with them, and showed women the same care and concern He showed to men.

C. Jesus Demonstrated the High Value He Placed on Women by According Them Dignity in His Ministry.

Jesus accorded dignity to women in His ministry in three ways: (1) by employing women as illustrations in His teaching, (2) by teaching women theological truths, and (3) by having women participate in His life and ministry. As indicated above in Section A (and also note 5), women were not always held in high repute by many of Jesus' contemporaries. Jesus' ministry gave a renewed respect to the place of women in His society.

First, women were employed by Jesus quite freely as illustrations in His teaching. Mention of the queen of the south (Matthew 12:42; cf. Luke 11:31) reminded His audience how a foreign queen travelled far to find the truth, but it was also used to warn of coming judgment for those who reject Christ. Jesus likened the kingdom of heaven to the leaven worked into bread dough by a woman (Matthew 13:33). Some debate whether the leaven represents the rapid expansion of God's kingdom or rather the spread of evil (cf. Matthew 16:6, 12). In either case, Jesus chose to use an illustration that would no doubt awaken the interest of His female listeners.

Jesus also taught (Matthew 24:41; cf. Luke 17:34-37) that at the time of His second coming (in power and glory) women would be about their daily tasks, in this case grinding grain on a hand-mill. These women as well as men will be divided and judged over their relationship to Christ. One goes to judgment (Luke 17:37), while the other enters into the kingdom. Another parable Jesus taught mentioning women almost exclusively is that of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-10). Jesus used them as examples of readiness (or lack of the same) for Christ's kingdom.

Jesus mentioned the widow of Zarephath (Luke 4:26) as an example of those outside Israel who receive God's blessings. The healing of the leper Naaman (Luke 4:27; cf. 2 Kings 5:2-4) illustrated the same point one verse later, but brought thoughts to mind of the faithful witness of the Israelite maid.

Jesus' parable of lost things (sheep, shekel, and son) in Luke 15 presents some interesting parallels between the shepherd and the woman. Jesus uses male and female, each with different roles, with neither elevated or depreciated.¹⁹ Both serve to illustrate God's seeking the lost and rejoicing over their salvation.

The need for steadfast prayer was illustrated by a widow's persistence before a corrupt judge (Luke 18:1-5). Female hearers must have taken heart to hear Jesus praise a woman's persistence in their male-dominated culture. Jesus also com-

mented on a poor widow who gave all she had to God in the women's court of the temple (Luke 21:1-4; cf. 20:1; Mark 12:41-44). Her heart attitude allowed her to give a much larger percentage (she gave 100 percent) than all the others because she must have trusted God to fully meet her needs.

Jesus not only chose women to illustrate His teaching, but also was concerned that women should be allowed to sit under His teaching as well. This may not seem surprising to those ready to enter the twenty-first century, but it was unusual in Jesus' day.

Feminists see Luke 10:38-42 as crucial in showing women being taught by Christ. Hull calls it "the most significant encounter . . . because it taught that women should prefer studying theology over a preoccupation with domestic chores."²⁰ Unfortunately, Hull misrepresents "traditionalists" when she reports them as saying women should not study theology.²¹ Certainly, women *are* to learn and apply the Word of God. This is vitally important. But actually, the application is much broader than Hull implies. *Every* believer must make countless decisions throughout life, constantly choosing to act as a pupil with Jesus as the teacher. It does not mean that other duties or Christian graces are to be ignored, but it does imply that some things ("what is better," v. 42) are more important than other things. There are no role distinctions for learning from Christ.

On a later visit of Jesus to Bethany, it was Martha who was taught by Jesus while Mary sat in the house (John 11:20). For Martha, "Her growth is his goal, even in the midst of her tears of mourning for her brother" (Lazarus).²² Jesus instructed her about the resurrection, and even that He was the resurrection and the life (John 11:25-26). Thereupon, Martha gave a superb confession about Christ, saying, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27, NKJV). On two other occasions Christ personally taught female disciples, even if in non-traditional teaching settings. On His way to the crucifixion, Jesus gave an extended proverb to a group of weeping women (Luke 23:27-31). He said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'" He was saying that the future would see a worse judgment, probably using an *a fortiori* argument. If Christ, whom Pilate declared to be an innocent man, could be crucified, what will happen to those whom Rome judges to be guilty? Christ's final teaching to a woman is contained in His post-resurrection words to Mary Magdalene concerning His ascension (John 20:17). Jesus asks Mary to convey His words to the others, which she does (20:18).

An additional way that Jesus accorded dignity to women during His ministry was in having women participate in His life and ministry. Luke 2 mentions both the briefest and the most extensive of female associations in the life of Jesus. Anna of Asher was a godly, aged prophetess who resided in the temple area (Luke 2:36-38). She gave thanks for Jesus, whom she recognized as Messiah, when His parents presented him to God at six weeks of age (Luke 2:22; cf. Exodus 13:12, 15; Leviticus 12:2-6). Luke purposely pairs her actions with those of Simeon, just as he balances Zachariah's story with that of Mary's. Care is taken to show female participation.

The woman whom God chose to have the most extensive association with Jesus was His mother, Mary. But apart from the annunciation and birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, she is mentioned only five times in the Gospels—the

trip to Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-51); the Cana wedding (John 2:1-11); accompanying Jesus to Capernaum (John 2:12); asking for Jesus (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21); and at the cross (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25-27). Mary's life was significant for at least three reasons. (1) She was a firsthand witness of Jesus' divine origin *and* true humanity. (2) She was a tremendous model of godliness, faith, dedication, and patience, among other good qualities. (3) She, along with other women, was incorporated into the new life of the church at Pentecost.²³

Other women who participated in Christ's life fit into one of two groups—(1) those who served Him in some way, and (2) those who witnessed to His resurrection.

In the first category were two one-time participants as well as a group of women who served more frequently. Two women served Christ by anointing Him. Luke records an anointing of His feet by a notoriously sinful woman (7:36-50). The other Gospels tell of Mary's anointing of His head and feet with a pound of precious spikenard (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:2-8). These women served Christ out of love and appreciation, but Mary's anointing was even more significant because she did it with a view to His approaching death (Matthew 26:12; Mark 14:8; John 12:7). Mary had true spiritual insight, no doubt gained from Jesus' teaching. They both were truly thankful, and Christ accepted their thanks while healing, forgiving, and liberating as the different cases called for.

Those who ministered to Christ more frequently included Martha in Judea and a group of women in Galilee. Luke 10:40 records Martha attempting to get a meal ready for about fifteen persons. Jesus did not order her to stop serving but gently corrected her attitude about Mary. Martha served at another supper just a week before Christ's death (John 12:2), suggesting that her service was more than just occasional.

Luke 8:2-3 recounts another group of women who ministered to Jesus and His disciples financially.²⁴ They may have served Jesus in other general ways as well, since the term is used of these women twice elsewhere without any reference to money (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:41).²⁵ Their labor was important and some of their names are recorded—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome. There were also many others (Luke 8:3). We are not told how often these women travelled with Christ and the apostles. Hurley has suggested that they were more active while Jesus was in the Galilee region near their homes,²⁶ but Matthew 27:56 mentions their travel with Christ all the way to Jerusalem. Apparently when Jesus travelled in Judea (most of John's Gospel) and Samaria, He may sometimes have had the apostles make other arrangements for food and other provisions (Luke 9:52).

A final indication of the dignity accorded women in the ministry of Jesus is seen in the importance given to women in the resurrection accounts. In Christ's day, women were not considered reliable witnesses. Josephus warns, for example, "But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex."²⁷ Still, God chose to use women as His initial witnesses to His disciples.

It may be an overstatement to say that the women sent from the tomb were "certainly . . . given a 'quasi-apostolic role.'"²⁸ To invent the role of a quasi-apos-

the apostle will be discussed in the next major section of this chapter.

The question remains, why were the women chosen as witnesses of the resurrection? Was God bestowing a special honor on these women? Was God trying to indicate larger roles for women in His new community of believers? I believe both were intended.

All four Gospel writers bestow a great honor on the women who lovingly and with servant hearts came early to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body, thus paying their last respects. What if they were frightened and surprised by what they saw and heard (Matthew 28:5-8; Mark 16:5-8; Luke 24:2-9; John 20:1-2)? They still faithfully bore witness of Jesus' resurrection to His disciples and, no doubt, to countless others in the months and years that followed.

Some have contrasted the faith of the women witnesses with the unbelief of the apostles, but as Hurley notes, "Neither the women nor the disciples were really ready for the resurrection. The women had to be convinced by the angel."²⁹ The important point is that God did use women along with men at this strategic juncture in human history.

These women not only were the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, but also stand perpetually as examples for all believers. These women led the way in proclaiming the gospel—that Christ died for our sins, was buried, but rose again for our justification the third day. The duty and high privilege of witnessing for Christ is still open to every believer, without distinction as to gender.

II. Christ Recognized Role Distinctions for Men and Women.

Christ not only valued women very highly, but also demonstrated a clear role distinction between men and women. Nowhere is this issue seen more clearly than in Jesus' selection of only men for the role of apostle. Many Biblical feminists question the significance of this obvious role distinction, or explain it as cultural or as temporary. Siddons's brief comment is that dangers in travel and the "male-dominated" social structure of the time were reasons for the apostles' being only men.³⁰

But Jesus was not averse to breaking social customs when He felt it necessary. He criticized Pharisees to their face in public (Matthew 23:13-36), healed on the sabbath (Mark 1:21-27; Luke 13:14; John 5:8-10), and cleansed the temple (John 2:14-17; Matthew 21:12-13). Against custom, Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-9), ate with tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:11), and even ate with unwashed hands (Mark 7:1-23)! The point is that when moral issues were at stake, Jesus did not bend to cultural pressure. No, it was not social custom or cultural pressure that caused Jesus to appoint an all-male group of apostles. Had He so desired, He could easily have appointed six men and their wives as apostles, since the wives of the apostles frequently accompanied them (1 Corinthians 9:5). But no such arrangement was initiated.

In fact, Jewish culture did accept women into positions of leadership. Just three decades before Herod the Great took over as king, Israel was ruled for years by Queen Alexandra. The fact that an occasional judge (Deborah, Judges 4-5), or ruler (Athaliah, 2 Kings 11:3) was a woman also demonstrates that female leadership was possible. Even though many women have excellent leadership

qualities, God still has clear role distinctions in mind when apostleship and church leadership are considered.

After spending all night in prayer (Luke 6:12), Jesus chose His twelve apostles (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19). Apostleship was to involve leadership, rulership, and the reception of special revelation. Several functions of the apostles were immediately discernible: (1) The apostles were to be with Christ, undoubtedly to learn extensively and to be trained firsthand (Mark 3:14-15). (2) The apostles were the obvious official leaders in the early church. See Acts 2:14; 5:12, 18, 40, 42; 6:2-4; 9:29; 15:2, and Galatians 1:17. (3) Special rulership was committed to the apostles. Christ promised that the apostles would sit on twelve thrones ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30). (4) Christ promised the apostles reception of special revelation (John 16:13-15) and a special teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). (5) As a testimony of the fact that male leadership in the church has been permanently established by Christ, the names of the twelve apostles are forever inscribed on the very foundations of heaven itself. "Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Revelation 21:14, NKJV).

None of the above roles was performed by the women who followed Christ or ministered to Him. Though highly valued and given a new dignity by Christ, their roles were different from those of the men Christ selected for His top leadership positions. Women gave to Christ, served Him, fellowshipped with Him, accompanied Him, learned from Him, prayed, and testified of their salvation³¹ or of Christ's resurrection. But no woman in Christ's ministry was called, commissioned, or named as an apostle, or even performed in the role of an apostle. These roles and functions Christ reserved for men.³²

Spencer discounts these distinctions implied in Christ's choice of men as His apostles. She reasons, "If Jesus' choice of twelve male disciples signifies that females should not be leaders in the church, then, consistently his choice also signifies that Gentiles should not be leaders in the church."³³ In another setting Spencer voiced the same argument. "If the twelve included only Jews, why should we not say that only Jews can be pastors/elders?"³⁴

Her logic can be seen in the following syllogism:

- A. Jesus chose only male apostles.
- B. Jesus chose only Jewish apostles.
- C. Therefore, church elders must be male and Jewish.

Of course, the argument is invalid, so the conclusion is unproven. Historically, we know it to be false. Spencer wants us to see that Gentiles *did* occupy eldership positions in scores of "Gentile" churches founded by Paul. She would like us to conclude that if Jewishness is not required for eldership, neither should maleness be required.

But even a superficial analysis of the New Testament reveals that the Jews occupied a *unique* position during Christ's earthly ministry. Jesus was born to be a "ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel" (Matthew 2:6). Jesus was termed "the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25), and He proclaimed, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). He announced a soon-coming kingdom (Mark 1:15) and sent His apostles at first

only to the Jews (Matthew 10:6), promising them eventual rulership over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; cf. Acts 1:6). Considering the Jewishness of Christ's mission to redeem Israel (Luke 24:21), it is not surprising to find all Jews on the initial list of apostles. It was not cultural pressure but God's plan to bring salvation through the Jews that led to twelve Jewish apostles.

With the resurrection, Christ's mission expanded to include Gentiles (Matthew 28:19) "in this one body" (Ephesians 2:16), the church. Gentiles were not only saved, but became elders in the new organizational units of local churches. A Gentile (Luke) wrote two books of the New Testament (Luke and Acts), and several Gentiles such as Titus and Epaphroditus were Paul's apostolic assistants and coworkers. Thus, Jewish apostles were unique and foundational, but Gentiles rapidly came to assume leadership in the church.

But was maleness, like Jewishness, to be discarded as a requirement for apostle or elder? Was maleness only foundational as well? There is clearly a difference in this case. First, the church did not start as all male and then later become both male and female. Christ's followers were male and female from the beginning, and both men and women were present at the beginning of the church at Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Second, from all we can tell, male leadership was perpetuated by those whom Christ initially taught, trained, and to whom He committed the future leadership of His church. Since Acts continually reminds us of the leading of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in the work of the church and its leaders, the assumption is that leadership choices were also made in that manner.

That male leadership is to continue as the norm is borne out almost immediately once the church begins. In Acts 1:15-26, the first and only replacement apostle was selected. Evans asserts that women no doubt met the requirements to be an apostle "as set out in Acts 1:21-22."³⁵ She overlooks, however, that one of the very conditions listed is to be a male—" . . . it is necessary to choose one of the *men* [Greek *andron*] who have been with us . . ." (Acts 1:21, emphasis added).³⁶

A further example is not the direct teaching of Jesus, but additionally strongly suggests that male leadership in the church was Jesus' intention. This comes out of the selection instructions and results in Acts 6, where the first leaders besides the apostles were appointed. Plenty of women were numbered among the believers according to Acts 1:14; 5:1 and 5:14. A problem arose regarding the neglect of certain women (Acts 6:1). The church was told to select seven qualified *men* (*antras*, Acts 6:3). If the instruction had been to look for seven "human beings" (*anthropous*), and then only men had been selected, we might say their choice was cultural or perhaps happenstance. Instead, the choice of men was deliberate.

Therefore, we can conclude that in the choice of the twelve apostles, in the choice of only men to write the New Testament Scriptures, in the other leadership tasks given uniquely to the apostles, in the pattern of male leadership followed by those whom Jesus taught most closely, and even in the twelve names inscribed on the foundations of the heavenly city, Jesus clearly affirmed an abiding role distinction between men and women and an abiding leadership role for men.

But even though clear role distinction is seen in Christ's choice of the apostles and in the exclusive type of work they were given to perform, no barriers need exist between a believer and the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of gender. Jesus demonstrated only the highest regard for women, in both His life and teaching.

He recognized the intrinsic equality of men and women, and continually showed the worth and dignity of women as persons. Jesus valued their fellowship, prayers, service, financial support, testimony and witness. He honored women, taught women, and ministered to women in thoughtful ways.

As a result, women responded warmly to Jesus' ministry. Have things changed too drastically today for us to see this same Jesus? Not at all. Modern women can find the same rich fulfillment in serving Christ as did the Marys and Marthas of Judea, or the Joanna and Susannas of Galilee.

JESUS' TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN THE GOSPELS

Aída Besançon Spencer

In 1667 Quaker Margaret Fell declared that "women's speaking" was "justified, proved and allowed of by the Scriptures" because "women were the first that preached the tidings of the Resurrection of Jesus, and were sent by Christ's own command, before He ascended to the Father, John 20:17."¹ In this she was echoing Chrysostom's (fourth-century) sentiments that women carried on the race that "apostles and evangelists ran." About Andronicus and Junia he wrote:

Indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even amongst these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But they were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! How great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!²

Christian writers have long marveled at the impact of Jesus' words and deeds on the status of women, even when they have differed on the roles women and men were to have in the later church.

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the data in the Gospels once again, because even though many scholars view positively Jesus' affirmations of women, some are reluctant to see this as having bearing on women's possible leadership roles in the church.³ After an overview of what is generally accepted by all, that

¹Margaret Fell (Fox), *Women's Speaking Justified* (1667; reprint, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979). See also Ruth A. Tucker and Walter L. Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 230-31.

²John Chrysostom *Epistle to the Romans* 31.

³See, e.g., Michael J. Wilkins, "Women in the Teaching and Example of Jesus," in *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective*, ed. Robert L. Saucy and Judith K. TenElshof (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), pp. 91-112.

Jesus both affirmed and elevated women, I will examine more closely how Jesus' actions affect the priorities in women's lives. The chapter will conclude with a reexamination of the key point of disagreement: the significance of Jesus' choosing twelve males to form the so-called inner circle of his disciples.

Jesus Affirms Women

Recognizing that Jesus both affirmed and elevated the status of women has now become commonplace on both sides of the "women in leadership" divide. Among those opposed to women in senior leadership roles in the church, Michael Wilkins states that

Jesus restored and affirmed the worth and dignity of women. . . . [He] did not make a distinction between women and men in this ministry of restoration. . . . Women were called to be Jesus' disciples. . . . As disciples of Jesus, women have restored to them the full dignity that was theirs in the creation, when men and women were both created in the image of God. . . . Women received instruction and nurture as Jesus' disciples.⁴

He adds, "Jesus restored and affirmed women to his ministry team" as "co-laborers with men."⁵

Wilkins follows the positive tone set earlier by James Borland: "Christ placed a high value on women" by "recognizing their intrinsic value as persons," by "ministering to women" and by "accord[ing] them dignity in his ministry."⁶ Wayne House agrees: "Jesus treated women with kindness and respect and considered them equal before God," and he assumed women were "of equal intelligence, equal spiritual discernment, and equal religious acumen."⁷ Samuele Bacchiocchi further reiterates this perspective. Jesus was unique in contrast to first-century Judaism. He viewed women as "persons for whom He had come . . . not in terms of sex, age or marital status." He appreciated their "intelligence and faith," accepted women as "treasured members of the human family," admitted them "into His fellowship" and took "time to teach them the truths of the Kingdom of God."⁸

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 95, 97-98.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁶James A. Borland, "Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus," in *RBMW*, pp. 113-115, 117. See also James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981), pp. 82-111.

⁷H. Wayne House, *The Role of Women in Ministry Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), pp. 21, 82.

⁸Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1987), pp. 47-50.

2:19, 34-35, 51). A Canaanite woman is also extolled for her great faith (Mt 15:28; cf. Lk 4:25-26), similar to the way a Roman soldier is praised (Mt 8:10). Likewise a restored prostitute who is allowed to touch Jesus is commended for her faith, greater than that of the rude Simon and his Pharisee friends (Lk 7:36-50). A healed woman is called "a daughter of Abraham" (Lk 13:16) in the same way as a male tax collector is called a restored "son of Abraham" (Lk 19:9-10); thus both women and men are included in the newly formed people of God that Christ himself both represents and gathers. And Mary of Bethany is commended for her insight into Jesus' coming crucifixion—insight that went far beyond that of the Twelve (Jn 12:1-8).

Besides these, Luke singles out Elizabeth who names John (Lk 1:60), the prophet Anna (Lk 2:36-38), the named women who are among his disciples (8:1-3), an only daughter whom Jesus heals (Lk 8:40-42, 49-56), a woman with constant bleeding who by touching Jesus' cloak makes him "unclean" (Lk 8:43-48), Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42), the women who mourn his impending death (Lk 23:27-28), and the women who come to anoint the buried Jesus but instead are the first to hear and tell of the resurrection (Lk 23:55-24:12).

Fourth, Jesus' teachings and comments often take into consideration a woman's perspective. He uses female images for himself—a hen desiring to gather her chicks under her wings (Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34). Similarly God's care for the lost exemplified in Jesus' eating with sinners is pictured not only as a father with lost sons (Lk 15:11-32) but also as a woman with a lost coin (Lk 15:8-9). Humanity is described as those "born of women" (Mt 11:11). Both father and mother are to be honored (Mk 7:10-11).

In his analogies Jesus uses household activities common to women, such as sewing (Lk 5:36) and cooking (Lk 6:38; 13:21). Household service is a key to understanding genuine obedience to God: feeding and clothing the hungry, the stranger, the ill, the inmate, the wounded (Mt 25:37-39, 42-43; Lk 10:34). The church becomes a loving family (Mt 23:8; Jn 19:25-27). Jesus shows special concern for pregnant and nursing women and widows (Mt 24:19; Mk 12:40; 13:17; Lk 7:12-17; 18:3; 20:47; 21:2-4, 23; 23:29; Jn 16:21). Pressure against Christ's followers will come from both male and female relatives (Mt 10:35-37; 19:29; Mk 10:29-30; Lk 12:53; 14:26; 18:29; 21:16). And of course marriage has a significant place in representing God's reign (Mt 25:1; Mk 2:19; Lk 5:34-35; Jn 2:1).

Thus most scholars would agree that Jesus' teachings and actions are favorable to women and that women are an important part of his ministry. Nonetheless, ad-

The ways Jesus affirmed women can be summarized under four broad categories. First, Jesus' conversations with women indicate his esteem for them. Jesus openly conversed with women despite the ancient practice of discouraging men from speaking with women in public.⁹ For example, in John's Gospel Jesus has a deep theological discussion with a man, Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21), followed by a deep theological discussion with a woman, a Samaritan, at Jacob's well (Jn 4:4-42). She is the first person to whom Jesus discloses that he is the Messiah (Jn 4:25-26) and she becomes an evangelist to her people (Jn 4:28-29, 39-42). Later in the same Gospel, Martha affirms the key doctrines about Jesus: Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (Jn 11:27).¹⁰

Second, Jesus' teachings are favorable to women. Jesus is firm that marriage entails commitment between one man and one woman for life,¹¹ whereas rabbinic teaching allowed polygamy and divorce for many reasons other than adultery.¹² As well, women, like men, were to place obedience to God as most important (Mt 12:46-50; Mk 3:31-35; Lk 8:19-21; 11:27-28).

Third, women form an important part of Jesus' ministry, helping usher in the time of God's rule. Five women are included in his messianic pedigree: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and of course Mary (Mt 1:3-16). Many women serve as positive models of faith. Mary's role, as a virgin who conceived by the Holy Spirit, is highlighted. She is presented as a thinker of great faith (Mt 1:18; Lk 1:26-56;

⁹We are explicitly told that Jesus' disciples were "surprised" that he spoke "with a woman" (Jn 4:27). According to rabbinic teaching, if a woman spoke with a man in public she could be divorced without having her dowry repaid (*Mishnah Ketubbot* 1:8; 7:6). Earlier ben Sirach asserted, "Do not let [your daughter] parade her beauty before any man" (*Ecclesiasticus* 42:12).

¹⁰For extended descriptions of Jesus' special treatment of women, see Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1985), chap. 4; Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), pp. 164-290; Linda L. Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), pp. 48-60, 109-111.

¹¹See, e.g., Matthew 5:31-32; note that this is preceded by his extending adultery to include even looking at another woman lustfully (Mt 5:27-30). See further Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18.

¹²For polygamy see *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 2:4. The schools of Hillel and Shammai debated the allowable grounds for divorce on the basis of the phrase "something objectionable about her" (*Deut* 24:1). The Hillelites took the extreme view (see esp. *Mishnah Gittin* 9:10), which allowed divorce even for a spoiled dish or a facial blemish (*Babylonian Talmud Ketubbot* 75a) or if the husband found someone more attractive. See also *Mishnah Yevamot* 14:1; *Mishnah Ketubbot* 7:1-10; *Mishnah Qiddushin* 2:5. On the Greek side, even though Epictetus argues for monogamy, he begins with the presupposition that "women by nature" are "common property" (*Discourses* 2.4.8-10).

vocates of male-only leadership do not always develop the implications of Jesus' actions toward women—actions that stood in remarkable contrast to his own culture and society.

Jesus' Actions Affect Women's Priorities

Rather than simply reassert, as many continue to do, that "the woman's place is in the home"—as though that were a *biblical* (and not merely cultural) viewpoint—one needs to ask such questions as: Why were first-century Jewish women discouraged from having formal higher education in biblical law? Why were women not required to pursue religious training at all or given merit if they did study? Why was no one required or encouraged to teach them?¹³ Why were women not admitted into Jewish schools? Why even in the synagogue service were they not to "study fully"?

These restrictions for women were made for two reasons: (1) women were primarily to be homemakers, and (2) they were to be protected against unchastity. Philo of Alexandria, a slightly older contemporary of Jesus, described what was considered the ideal for Jewish women in the Diaspora:

Market-places and council-halls and law-courts and gatherings and meetings, where a large number of people are assembled, and open-air life with full scope for discussion and action—all these are suitable to men in both war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house, within which the middle door is taken by the maidens as their boundary, and the outer door by those who have reached full womanhood. Organized communities are of two sorts, the greater which we call cities and the smaller which we call households. Both of these have their governors; the government of the greater is assigned to men under the name of statesmanship, that of the lesser, known as household management, to women.¹⁴

Similarly, rabbinic laws were constructed to ensure that women were not encouraged to leave their homes. As in Philo, the location of women seems to be the

¹³Wilkins ("Women," p. 351 n. 18) suggests that *Mishnah Nedarim* 4:3 implies that a father could teach his sons and daughters Scripture. But this is not referring to formal training in Torah but to the training a husband/father was expected to give to his whole household so that they all might walk in the ways of the Lord. See further Aida Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1985), pp. 47-56.

¹⁴Philo of Alexandria *On the Special Laws* 3.169-70 (LCL 7:583-85). Cf. *Flaccus* 89 (LCL 9:51), where this is expressed in a more abbreviated form.

underlying concern.¹⁵ Indeed Jewish law consistently assumed the necessity for women to be centered on their household. If women spent time in study of the law, it was feared, their care of the household would suffer.

Wives were required to sustain a household's economy, unless they had servants to direct. For instance in the *Mishnah* a wife is required to grind flour, bake bread, wash clothes, cook food, nurse her child, make ready her husband's bed, oversee sabbath celebrations and spin wool.¹⁶ Women were so integrally associated with the house and homemaking that Rabbi Judah said that "his house" (in *Lev* 16:6) is a synonym for "his wife."¹⁷ Rabbi Jose, commenting on *Yoma* 1:1, proudly adds: "Never have I called my wife by that word [my wife], but always 'my home.'" Even a woman's body came to be perceived as constructed for homemaking. Rabbi Hisda thus interprets *Genesis* 2:22, wherein God takes Adam's rib and "builds (it) into a woman": "This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, built Eve in the shape of a storehouse. As a storehouse is [made] wide below and narrow above so that it may contain the produce, so was [the womb of] a woman [made] wide below and narrow above so that it may contain the embryo."¹⁸

However, this emphasis on women's remaining in the household as much as economically possible does not flow from any clear teaching in the Old Testament. (According to *Deuteronomy* 31:12 and *Joshua* 8:35 all people—Hebrew men, women, children and foreigners—were exhorted to attend regularly the reading of the Law.) Rather, it reflects an inculturation from the larger pagan society that goes far back in time. For instance, Xenophon (fourth century B.C.) creates an ideal gentleman, Ischomachus, who explains to his wife that God

¹⁵Women were exempt from leaving the home for any period of time. Thus they were exempt from attending synagogue school as well as traveling to Jerusalem for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (*Mishnah Qiddushin* 1:7, *Hagigah* 1:1, *Sukkah* 2:8). The rabbis concluded that the Torah was applicable to men who traveled about daily since they considered the Torah comparable to phylacteries (small leather boxes) worn on the head and left arm during prayer by men only. A woman instead had a *mezuzah* on her doorpost (*Mishnah Berakhot* 3:3; *Babylonian Talmud Qiddushin* 34a-35a). At a later time, Rabbi Jeremiah upheld an ancient tradition when he said, "A woman generally stays at home, whereas a man goes out into the streets and learns understanding from men" (*Midrash Rabbah* *Genesis* 1, 18.1).

¹⁶*Mishnah Keritot* 5:5, 9.

¹⁷*Mishnah Yoma* 1:1.

¹⁸*Babylonian Talmud Erubin* 18a-b; see Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*, pp. 47-57. *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (which is semi-Arian) also relegates women to indoor tasks: "Let the widow therefore own herself to be the altar of God, and let her sit in her house, and not enter into the houses of the faithful, under any pretence, to receive anything; for the altar of God never runs about, but is fixed in one place" (3.1.6).

from the first adapted the woman's nature, I think, to the indoor and man's to the outdoor tasks and cares. For he made the man's body and mind more capable of enduring cold and heat, and journeys and campaigns; and therefore imposed on him the outdoor tasks. To the woman, since he has made her body less capable of such endurance, I take it that God has assigned the indoor tasks. And knowing that he had created in the woman and had imposed on her the nourishment of the infants, he meted out to her a larger portion of affection for new-born babes than to the man. And since he imposed on the woman the protection of the stores also, knowing that for protection a fearful disposition is no disadvantage, God meted out a larger share of fear to the woman than to the man; and knowing that he who deals with outdoor tasks will have to be their defender against any wrong-doer, he meted out to him again a larger share of courage. . . . Thus, to the woman it is more honorable to stay indoors than to abide in the fields, but to the man it is unseemly rather to stay indoors than to attend to the work outside.¹⁹

Jesus, in contrast, does not treat women primarily as homemakers. A woman called out in Jesus' hearing: "Blessed is the woman who gave you birth and nursed you!" Here we see this principle of woman primarily as mother voiced before Jesus. And what is his reply? "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Lk 11:27-28). What Jesus states here explicitly, he models earlier in his actions. Thus when Mary sits as a pupil in rabbinic fashion before Jesus (Lk 10:38-42) while Martha follows the cultural mandate to serve as homemaker, Jesus declares that Mary is the one who has selected the good share—to sit at a rabbi's feet in learning. She has made the right choice, and he will not allow anyone to take learning away from those who sit at his feet.²⁰

Despite all this, many evangelicals today still see homemaking as women's primary role. For instance, Thomas R. Schreiner writes that childbearing "represents the fulfillment of the woman's domestic role as a mother in distinction from the man. Childbearing, then, is probably selected by synecdoche [in 1 Tim 2:15] as representing the appropriate role for women."²¹ James Hurley agrees: "Women in general (and most women in [Paul's] day) will be kept safe from seizing men's roles by participating in marital life (symbolized by childbirth)." Similarly, Dorothy

¹⁹Xenophon *Oeconomicus* 7.22-25, 30.

²⁰See Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*, pp. 57-63; Hurley, *Man and Woman*, pp. 88-89; and most contemporary commentaries on Luke.

²¹Thomas R. Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15: A Dialogue with Scholarship," in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), pp. 150-51.

Patterson asserts: "Keeping the home is God's assignment to the wife."²²

I am by no means suggesting that bearing and rearing children are not essential and honorable tasks. Rather, obeying and learning from God have a *higher* priority for men as well as for women. Moreover, rearing children is a significant ministry for men as well as women. Godly overseers and deacons need to govern well their own household before becoming church leaders (1 Tim 3:4-5, 12), just as godly widows do (1 Tim 5:10). Indeed, how can they say they love God if they do not love, and therefore care for, their neighbors and family (e.g., 1 Jn 4:8)?

Jesus' Apostles Affirm the Jewish Foundation of His Covenant

Despite noting Jesus' affirmation of women as people, many supporters of male-only leadership today use the same "evidence" to restrict women's roles as did the fourth-century *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, which declared:

We do not permit our "women to teach in the Church," but only to pray and hear those that teach; for our Master and Lord, Jesus Himself, when He sent us the twelve to make disciples of the people and of the nations, did nowhere send out women to preach, although He did not want such.²³

This argument has several levels. First, it assumes that gender is the abiding precedent but does not extend this precedent to race or political state; thereby it selectively eliminates "male and female" from the basis for equality in Christ established in Galatians 3:28. The same argumentative strategy could be used to exclude all Gentiles from leadership. Second, it assumes that what the biblical model does not establish it thereby prohibits. Yet although the biblical model establishes that men *can* be apostles, it does not establish that women *cannot* be. The hermeneutical presupposition of the *Constitutions*, and that of some contemporary evangelicals, seems to be that the Bible's teaching is limited to whatever is explicitly stated. In effect, if the text does not specifically say you *may* do something, then you may not. Thus House, for example, states: "The biblical record says nothing at all about Christ considering a woman's role in ministry leadership or spiritual headship in-distinguishable from a man's. There is no evidence that any woman was commissioned as one of the seventy-two or the Twelve."²⁴ Silence on this matter means that

²²Hurley, *Man and Woman*, p. 223; Dorothy Patterson, "The High Calling of Wife and Mother in Biblical Perspective," in *RBMW*, p. 366.

²³*Constitutions* 3.1.6.

²⁴House, *Role of Women*, p. 21.

women may not be ordained as overseers.

What makes this hermeneutical stance more valid than its opposite, except assertion pure and simple? Why not take a less limited view of the text? If the text does not actually prohibit something, either explicitly or in principle, one may well choose to do it—especially given the way Jesus explicitly affirms women. Nowhere does Jesus ever say—or even imply in anything he says—that only men can be leaders in the church. Similarly, neither of the two ecumenical councils at Nicea and Chalcedon (A.D. 325 and 451) limits church leadership to men.²⁵

Wilkins takes the male-only argument a step further by mapping out concentric circles to locate the various followers of Jesus: the “large number of disciples who believed in Jesus”; the Seventy(-two) who were “sent out on a preaching tour” (Lk 10:1-17); the women (not included in the Seventy[-two]) who “traveled with Jesus and the Twelve to support Jesus’ missionary tour (Luke 8:1-3)”; the Twelve “who were called to be trained as apostles”; and the inner circle of “Peter, James, John, and sometimes Andrew (e.g., Mark 13:3).”²⁶ Under this scenario, women can be among the disciples “who have believed on Jesus” and are “called into ministry with and to Him.” But their absence from the two inner circles means that they were not among those being trained “to be the leadership of the church.”²⁷

In order to evaluate this recent reconstruction of the *Constitutions’* argument, we need to reconsider what may appear obvious but is often neglected: the emphasis in Jesus’ own teachings. He does not teach that we will advance God’s reign by maintaining male-female distinctions in leadership. For example, in Mark’s Gospel we learn that Jesus has authority on earth to forgive (Mk 2:10, 17) and is Lord of the sabbath (Mk 2:27; 3:3-5); his family is composed of those who do God’s will (Mk 3:31-35); he is merciful and compassionate (Mk 5:19; 6:34), the Messiah, the crucified one, God’s beloved Son who will return (Mk 8:29, 31; 9:7, 31; 14:61-62). Explicit teachings such as these, which have the same meaning for both men and

²⁵It was the Synod of Laodicea in Phrygia (A.D. 343-81) that began a process of restricting women deacons, laity, artists and Messianic Jews. For example, female elders are not to be appointed in the church (canon 11), women may not approach the altar (canon 44), a deacon may not sit in the presence of an elder (canon 20), only the canonical singers may sing in the church (canon 15), and Christians may not rest but must work on the sabbath so as not to “judaize” (canon 29). Ironically, as the church became more anti-Semitic, it also became more legalistic! The Council of Trullo explains one reason women could not speak during the divine liturgy: their monthly flux of blood was polluting (canon 70)—a total collapsing of new covenant ministry into that of the old.

²⁶See Wilkins, “Women,” pp. 96-99.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 101-2.

women, are the focus of the Gospels. Jesus’ teachings do not focus on gender or race for Christian leaders.

In the same vein, the authority given to the apostles by Jesus was not over other people but rather over demons or unclean spirits (to drive them out) and over illness and death—that is, against nonhuman enemies of God’s reign (Mt 10:1, 8; Mk 3:14-15; 6:7-30; Lk 9:1).²⁸ Thus Jesus’ apostles were to be distinct from false apostles who, like Gentile leaders, take authority to dominate others (Mk 10:42-45; 2 Cor 11:20-21). When some argue today that only men are to have authority in the church, they appear still to be arguing in this pagan vein of “who is the greatest?” (Mk 9:34)—in this case, men or women. When the truly “greatest” welcomes the little child in Jesus’ name, leadership no longer is a question of power but rather of service.²⁹ These instructions to the Twelve are important for all Christians, especially leaders, setting forth the Christlike character traits they should have. Leaders are to be like Jesus, who came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many, not like the Gentiles who “lord it over” others.³⁰

Furthermore, apostleship is not synonymous with church leadership as such. At a very early stage in the church “apostles” and “elders” were distinguishable categories (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4). A little later (1 Cor 12:28), along with “apostle,” Paul lists other gifts such as “prophet” (one who confronts and builds up the church, cf. 1 Cor. 14:4), “teacher” (one who leads by instructing) and “leadership” (*kybernēsis* = “guidance”). Moreover, “apostle” is never linked directly to “overseer” (e.g., 1 Tim 3:1).

So why did Jesus choose twelve Jewish men as the first apostles? First, he chose twelve Jews to serve as a synecdoche, representing the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30; Rev 21:12). Jesus’ call to ministry was focused on reaching Israel³¹ because the earlier covenant was made with Israel (e.g., Gen 35:10-12; 1 Kings 18:31). Jesus’ choice of the Twelve indicates the importance of the new covenant’s being founded on the old covenant. That is why at the end of the New Testament the two covenant peoples are symbolically joined in the New Jerusalem, on

²⁸See the discussion in chapter fifteen below.

²⁹Leadership established according to the principles of a crucified Messiah is the difficult lesson Paul tries to explain to the Corinthians (in both letters).

³⁰Mk 10:42-45. See also Matthew 18:1-5; 19:14; 20:20-27; 21:15-16; Mark 9:35-37; 10:13-16; 12:14, 38-40; Luke 9:46-48; 10:21; 18:16-17; 20:21; 22:24-27; John 13:12-17. Cf. Gilbert Bilezikian, “Biblical Community Versus Gender-Based Hierarchy,” *Priscilla Papers* 16 (2002): 3-10.

³¹Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24; Luke 7:9; John 1:11; Romans 15:8; 13:1; Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.

whose twelve foundations are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb and whose twelve gates bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev 21:12-14). Gentile inclusion in God's household rests on the earlier witness of Jewish apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). Many of the original twelve focused their ministries in Jerusalem and to the Jews (Acts 8:1,14; cf. Gal 1:17; 2:8).

The Twelve, who represent the twelve tribes, do so because they also represent the twelve patriarchs.³² Thus the Twelve could not have been other than Jewish females. If there had been Gentiles or women or slaves among them, the deliberate reconstitution of Israel in Jesus himself, signaled by the Father at his baptism (Mt 3:13-17), simply would not have worked.³³ As an integral part of the ministry of Jesus, the Twelve represented not only the twelve patriarchs/tribes of Israel but also the newly constituted Israel under the new covenant in Christ. Consequently, the Twelve cannot serve as precedents for *Gentile* leadership, which is what prevails in the church today.³⁴

³²Richard Bauckham cites Numbers 1:4-16 as important because it shows the Twelve are the symbolic heads of the new Israel, corresponding to the twelve patriarchs of Israel's founding generation (*Called Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002], p. 188). Scot McKnight also notes the importance of the Twelve as a symbol of the leadership characteristics of Jesus' new "nation," so that the land could be reclaimed for God's covenant ("Jesus and the Twelve," *BBR* 11 (2001): 229-31).

³³I am indebted to Gordon Fee for some of these observations. Fee further notes that during the whole of his ministry Jesus himself symbolically steps into the role of Israel, from his baptism (in the Red Sea) and forty days in the desert to be tested (he overcame precisely where Israel failed), to his assuming the role both of Israel's King-Messiah (Son of God; Ps 2:7) and of Isaiah's Suffering Servant, articulated for him in the voice from heaven at his baptism. And at the end he symbolically "cleanses" the temple and offers his own resurrection as the new locus of God's presence among his people (Jn 2:22). With the Twelve about him at the final meal, he reconstitutes the bread and wine of Passover to become a meal in which they will recall his death as effecting the new covenant. At the same time, the one certain "instruction" he gave to the Twelve is about their eschatological role in "judging" Israel (Lk 22:13-30).

³⁴Some evangelicals (e.g., Borland, "Women in the Life," p. 122) have observed that even after the resurrection Peter specified that Judas's replacement had to be male. However, Acts 1:21-22 literally reads: "Therefore, it is necessary that of those having accompanied us, one of these men, who at the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning from John's baptism until the day he was taken up from us—one of these should become a witness of his resurrection with us (my trans.). The emphasis of the text is on someone who had been with the Twelve throughout Jesus' ministry ("of those who accompanied us"). The sentence structure highlights not the candidate's gender but rather the candidate's function as an eyewitness to Jesus' life, resurrection and ascension. In addition, even though Peter uses the plural of *anēr* ("men") in Acts 1:21, he also employs this term when speaking to a crowd including men and women. At Pentecost women are present (Acts 1:14) and spoken about ("your sons and daughters will prophesy," Acts 2:17); nevertheless Peter

Nevertheless, the first set of twelve apostles had certain other defining criteria in common with the rest of the apostles. First, an apostle by definition is a messenger, someone "sent off" with orders. What makes Christ's apostles distinct from other apostles is that they were sent by and represented Jesus himself (Mt 10:5; Mk 3:14). Paul also was sent by Christ (Acts 26:16-18) and preached a gospel not of human origin (Gal 1:11-12). By way of contrast, Epaphroditus was an apostle/messenger "sent off" from and representing the church at Philippi to Paul (Phil 2:25), and the "brothers" who carried the monetary gift to Corinth were "apostles [messengers] from the churches" (2 Cor 8:16-24).

Second, the first apostles had to have been "with" Jesus. Indeed, the first reason for his appointing the Twelve was for them "to be with" him (Mk 3:14; cf. Lk 8:1; Acts 1:21-22). Being with Jesus was a key component of their training.

Third, an apostle is an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. When Paul exclaims to the Corinthians, "Am I not an apostle?" he first follows that rhetorical question with the defense, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor 9:1). Having seen the risen Lord is crucial in the Gospels (Mt 28:18-20; Jn 20:21-22), in Acts (1:21-22; 4:33) and in the letters (1 Cor 15:5-8; Gal 1:11-12). As eyewitnesses to the resurrection, apostles are listed first among God's gifts to the church (1 Cor 12:28-29).³⁵

Fourth, an apostle is commissioned to preach God's reign: "As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near'" (Mt 10:7; Mk 3:14; Lk 9:2). Preaching (*kēryssō*) is never an action prohibited to women.

Thus *apostolos* in the Gospels clearly includes the twelve who were chosen from a larger group of disciples for the first commission (Mt 10:1-2; Lk 6:13). After Jesus' death and resurrection, *apostle* was broadened to refer to other disciples who had been with Jesus and now were sent off as witnesses to the resurrection. And in the new covenant era the apostolic witness includes both women and men.

This larger group of apostles explicitly includes Paul (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2

addresses the crowd with the plural of *anēr*, "fellow Jews" (Acts 2:14; see also Acts 17:22, 34; 25:23-24). Moreover, even if Peter were being gender-specific in Acts 1:21-22 but not in Acts 2:14, the Twelve were not replaced at all after their deaths (e.g., James in Acts 12:2), which suggests that by then they had served their purpose of symbolically representing Israel at the start of the new covenant.

³⁵It is doubtful that today's church planter is a New Testament "apostle" of Jesus Christ, since being a witness of the resurrection is a key aspect of the latter. It is also doubtful whether Timothy should be included as an "apostle," despite the "we" in 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7; he is called an "evangelist" in 2 Timothy 4:5.

Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Tit 1:1),³⁶ Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), James (Gal 1:1, 12-19), and Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7).³⁷ Paul and James the brother of Jesus are included in the list of apostles because they were eyewitnesses to the Messiah's resurrection (1 Cor 15:7-8). Then how might Junia, Barnabas and Andronicus have been included? They may have been among the "more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters" who witnessed the risen Lord (1 Cor 15:6-7).³⁸ Or being part of the larger group of "all the apostles," perhaps they had been among the Seventy-two (Lk 10:1).³⁹ Clement of Rome calls Apollōs an apostle.⁴⁰ Eusebius suggests that Barnabas, Sosthenes, Matthias and Justus were part of the Seventy(-two) and that the more than five hundred witnesses and James the Lord's brother were apostles as well. Eusebius explains that these other apostles were "patterned on the Twelve."⁴¹

This understanding of the New Testament data means that the female disciples, like the males, had spent time with Jesus and were sent out to preach God's reign. They were *with* Jesus, learning from his teachings to seek God's reign, selling their possessions and giving all to the Lord's ministry, as they were taught by Jesus (Lk 12:31-34; 18:22). The women from Galilee may not have been part of the Twelve, but they certainly were part of an inner circle that was trained in all ways as the twelve men were. They had been with Jesus since Galilee (Mt 4:23; 27:55; Mk 15:40-41; Lk 23:49, 55). Since the angels reminded the women that in Galilee Jesus had told them he would suffer, be crucified and be raised (Lk 24:6-8), this suggests they were present in Matthew 17:22, Mark 9:31 and Luke 9:18-22. Mark tells us Jesus wanted to be separated from the crowds because "he

³⁶In Galatians 1:17 he also refers to "those who were apostles before I was," presumably the Twelve and James.

³⁷Junia is "outstanding among the apostles" (Rom 16:7); see the discussion of this matter in chapter six above.

³⁸"Brothers and sisters" is an accurate translation of the plural of *adelphos*. See LSJ, p. 20. See also Aida Besançon Spencer, "Exclusive Language—Is It Accurate?" *RevExp* 95 (1998): 388-89. Women are included clearly in the plural of *adelphos* in Acts 16:40 and Philippians 4:1-2.

³⁹The seventy-two disciples most likely are a deliberate echo of the seventy-two elders who helped Moses (Num 11:16-17, 26-29). They model the premise that all the Lord's people can be filled with God's Spirit and prophesy, as would happen at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18). On the textual question favoring seventy-two over seventy (as in the TNIV), see Kurt Aland's argument in *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 2002), p. 127.

⁴⁰1 Clement 47:3-4.

⁴¹Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 1.12; 3.5.7.

was teaching his disciples" (Mk 9:30). These women would have heard Jesus' teaching to "deny themselves and take up their cross daily" (Lk 9:18-25); thus they denied themselves by giving generously to Jesus' mission (Lk 8:2-3; Mt 27:55). They recognized, accepted and honored the forthcoming suffering of the Messiah by anointing Jesus before the crucifixion and being present at the crucifixion (Mt 26:6-13; 27:61; Mk 14:3-9; Lk 23:55; Jn 11:2; 12:3-8). Mary anointed Jesus' feet, having understood that the Messiah would be crucified (Jn 12:3-7), a lesson Peter did not understand until later (Mt 16:21-23; Lk 24:33-49; cf. 1 Pet 2:19-24).

The women did not understand everything perfectly. They too were surprised by the empty tomb, the angelic messengers and the resurrected Messiah (Mk 16:8). Nevertheless, as the eleven male disciples were in Jerusalem to hear Jesus' final relations, so too very likely were some early women disciples (Mk 8:31-33; Lk 24:33).⁴²

As witnesses of the resurrection, women were *sent* by Jesus to proclaim the good news. Jesus sends Mary Magdalene to "go" to "my brothers [and sisters] and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father'" (Jn 20:17).⁴³ Similarly, in the Synoptic accounts the angel first tells the women (Mary Magdalene, the "other Mary," Salome), "Go quickly and tell [Jesus] disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him'" (Mt 28:7; cf. Mk 16:1, 7; Lk 24:1-10). Then Jesus himself appears to the two Marys and commissions them: "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers [and sisters] to go to Galilee; there they will see me" (Mt 28:10).

Jesus certainly broke convention by choosing women as the first witnesses for the greatest event of all times, the resurrection, even though women were not considered valid witnesses in court. Roman law treated women as "weak" and "light-

⁴²It is possible that Cleopas's companion was his wife—after all, the two travelers invite Jesus into their home to stay with them (two single men living alone in a village dwelling seems most highly unlikely). Almost certainly Luke intends women to be included in his statement "They found the eleven and those with them." See Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, pp. 112-15, 165-94, 282, who explains exhaustively how the Galilean women were disciples by Jesus and present at Jesus' preascension teachings, as well as part of the seventy-two disciples. The women might also be included in "apostles" in Acts 1:2, 14. See also Lee Anna Starr, *The Bible Status of Women* (1926; reprint, New York: Garland, 1987), pp. 172-73.

⁴³Some in the early church regarded Mary Magdalene as "an apostle to the apostles" (Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations*, pp. 209-10; Esther de Boer, *Mary Magdalene* [Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1996], pp. 60-61).

minded."⁴⁴ First-century Jewish thinkers repeat this perspective. For instance, Philo declares that "the judgments of women as a rule are weaker."⁴⁵ Josephus proclaims that Jewish law states, "Let no evidence be accepted" from women because of their "levity and temerity."⁴⁶ Rabbinic law stated that women did not have to testify (*Mishnah Shevi'ot* 4:I, 3); they were ineligible to declare the new year and to speak for ownerless property (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 3:3). Women as witnesses were in the same class as dice players, usurers, pigeon flyers, traffickers in seventh-year produce and slaves (*Mishnah Rosh HaShanah* 1:8). Generally, rabbinic tradition disqualified women as witnesses.⁴⁷ Even some of the male disciples reflected such views when they did not at first believe the women who gave witness to the resurrection (Lk 24:11).

In contrast, for Jesus faith is the key determiner of one's place in the new covenant—as it originally was of the old covenant. Thus women functioned as witnesses or "apostles" who had been with Jesus, were eyewitnesses of the resurrection and were sent by Jesus to proclaim the good news.⁴⁸ As apostles sent by God, the twelve Jewish men looked back to the old covenant, whereas the multitudes of women and men looked forward, beyond the resurrection to the new covenant.

When scholars disqualify women from church leadership by using the twelve male apostles as precedents, they ignore the significance both of their number (twelve) and of their Jewishness, and they dismiss the importance of women's functioning as "apostles" and of Junia's being titled an "apostle." Why choose the Twelve and not, for example, the loyal Galilean women as paradigmatic of all leadership, since after Pentecost the rest of the Twelve (after Judas) are not replaced after their deaths in Acts (e.g., Acts 1:2)? If their particular ministry was not perpetuated, how can the Twelve serve as a precedent for church leadership today?

We do, however, have the precedents of men and women who were commissioned to preach the gospel. Therefore we should emphasize what Jesus emphasized in his teachings: humble mutual service, not male-female distinctions in leadership.

⁴⁴ Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*, p. 62. Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Whores and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken, 1975), p. 150. In contrast, when Peter calls wives a "weaker partner" (referring most likely to physical strength), his call is for husbands to bestow "honor" on "their with you of the gracious gift of life" (1 Pet 3:7).

⁴⁵ Philo *Embassy* 40.319.

⁴⁶ Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 4.8.15.219.

⁴⁷ For an explanation of the general rules and the exceptions, see Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), pp. 163-66.

⁴⁸ Similarly, Philip's four daughters "were prophesying" (Acts 21:9). The early church had no hesitation in calling them prophets (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.3.1).

In our applications we need to keep in mind what Jesus commanded and modeled and explicitly prohibited, not what we *assume* he implied by his actions.

Finally, we must remember that the new covenant is no longer focused on the nation of Israel—as the rest of the New Testament makes clear.

Conclusion

Jesus was "the light of all people" that "through him all might believe" (Jn 1:4, 7). Scholars agree that Jesus' ministry of salvation, restoration and transformation included men and women, without distinction. As their Creator, Jesus treated women as intrinsically valuable; he respected them as intelligent and faithful, and as disciples and laborers along with men.

Since we are agreed on these points, why are some churches not following the example of Jesus? Sometimes today the church and academia are not instructing women as disciples, not listening to their spiritual discernment and not treating them equally as collaborators.

Instead some still separate women for the indoor tasks of homemaking and men for the outdoor tasks of worldmaking. Jesus' practice undermined this scheme when he talked with women, instructed them along with men and sent them out on mission. If the Bible and ecumenical councils did not hold back women who wanted to lead others in serving Christ, why should we? We should act out of grace, not from an unwritten law. Maintaining male-leadership role distinctions is not the best way to save, restore and transform our church families and society.

John's heavenly vision is of "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev 7:9). In the postresurrection, post-Pentecost new covenant, apostles are no longer limited to twelve but are multitudes, because Jesus' ministry has refocused from the Jewish people (the twelve tribes, the old covenant) to the Gentiles (the nations, the many tribes, the new covenant). At Pentecost the Holy Spirit equipped every believer to be a priest and proclaimer before God. As Jesus had reminded the disciples earlier, Spirit-gifted leaders must be servants enabling all other new covenant priests to function fully.