

'SHE HAS SHOWN GREAT LOVE' GENDER EQUALITY

PROPER 6, YEAR C

Lectionary Texts: I Kings 21:1-10, 15-21a II Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15 Psalms 32 & 5:1-8
Galatians 2:15-21 Luke 7:36-8:3

Focus Text: Luke 7:36-8:3

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷ And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸ She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." ⁴¹ "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴ Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

^{8:1} Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, ² as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Philippians 4:1-3

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

2 Timothy 1:3-5

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY REV. JEAN RODENBOUGH,
PRESBYTERY OF SALEM, GREENSBORO

Luke does a peculiar thing with this passage about the woman who washes Jesus' feet and anoints him with precious oil. In the other three gospels, this story appears just before that of Jesus' Passion. In Luke's Gospel, however, the story not only carries a different focus, but is placed instead in the midst of Jesus' ministry before he goes to Jerusalem in the final days of his life.

There are other differences as well in Luke's account from that of the others: the naming (or not naming) of the characters; the description of the woman as someone in the city who was a sinner, echoed by the Pharisee in his derogatory reference to her; Luke's emphasis on gratitude in contrast to the theme of extravagance highlighted in the other three versions; and the portrayal of the women who figure in the verses that follow this story. We note that the woman in the other gospel accounts performs a priestly and prophetic act, that of anointing Jesus and foreshadowing his coming death, whereas Luke reshapes this story as an extreme example of penitence, forgiveness, and resultant gratitude. The emphasis here is on Jesus' act of forgiveness rather than on the woman's actions toward him. This account turns upon a submissively grateful act because of her absolution from an undesignated sin rather than an extravagant act of anointing which is emphasized in the other gospels.

The woman in Luke's story thus becomes a literary tool. Her response to Jesus and the way she receives his forgiveness is held up as a model for others. It is Jesus' redemptive response that points toward his crucifixion and resurrection, rather than the woman's act of anointing, so that the focus moves from her to Jesus as central to the action. Jesus then tells the woman her faith has saved her and sends her on her way with a benediction. In Mark and Matthew, Jesus lifts up this woman's act as one which will be remembered forever. Luke denies her that honor, and John omits that final declaration about her as well. This woman thus joins the ranks of anonymous and silent women, spoken for, but not given speech.

To give Luke credit for what he did accomplish in this story, however, there are some significant features embedded here. For example, there remains the depiction of Jesus as advocate and defender of women, whatever their background. He does not object to this alleged sinner touching him, a gesture that can defile a righteous man. In the version we have here he senses her love pouring out with her tears. We see him accept the anointing power of her gratitude for his forgiveness, symbolized by the ointment. She has received him, as he has received her. When he points out to his host the contrast in how each of the two has welcomed him, we are given a lesson in offering inclusive love to all who come to Jesus through us without showing distinction or discrimination.

To consider briefly the verses following this incident, in the listing of women who accompanied Jesus and the disciples, Luke unwittingly opens the door to an error of interpretation in future biblical scholarship. The proximity of the two passages strengthens that false understanding. One of the women in that group, "Mary, called Magdalene", named in reference to the seven devils cast out from her, becomes permanently linked to the woman in the previous story who was in all likelihood a prostitute. In truth, there is no justification for such an interpretation, other than tradition. Perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of Luke's version of this story, however, is the depiction of a subordinate role for women in Jesus' life. They are portrayed as serving him and the male disciples, a role which church tradition then perpetuates by denying women an equal status in the church hierarchies which developed afterward.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY REV. JEAN RODENBOUGH

When I applied to divinity school thirty years ago, I was asked by my interviewer, "Why don't you just be a good church member and serve the church that way?" That is, I was being advised to continue the traditional role of being a supportive woman to the men doing the "real work" of ministry.

Ignoring that advice, I enrolled, and when I graduated and sought a call to ministry, the response was, "We don't think our congregation is ready for a woman minister." Times are better now for women seeking calls to ministry, but the lunch line for service continues to be blocked by male church leadership. They stand with locked arms, holding off women from breaking through to many kinds of opportunities for ministry. But, we continue to hold up the model of that woman who broke in line and interrupted the order of the day. We find that Jesus is still there, ready to speak up for us. Now, we too have a voice, advocating parity for women in professional service to the church.

Yet there remain injustices, even apart from the damage to women's status in the church. Paraphrasing George Orwell in *Animal Farm*, "all are equal, but some are more equal than others."

Injustice prevails in attitudes that reflect our social environment as well, where racism, poverty, health care inadequacies, corporate greed, insular thinking, security and other ills still exist. The church has work to do to include everyone in its outreach ministries, its membership rolls, and leadership rosters. The same is true in our civil society.

During the efforts to pass the Equal Rights Amendment twenty-five years ago, the N.C. Council of Churches established a committee to work for passage of the Amendment in this state. Women and men together were mutually supportive in advocating for the Amendment through workshops, candlelight vigils, marches, articles, and lobbying our state legislators. Education on the significance and value of such an Amendment took place in Sunday Schools, women's study groups, and other gatherings. When the Amendment failed, all who had labored so diligently realized that they must find another way to address the still-present need for women's equality in all aspects of life: religion, education, economics, health, politics, and racial issues. About a dozen women who had been serving on the Equal Rights Amendment Committee decided their work wasn't over, and the group refocused as the Equal Rights Committee. These outstanding women, who contributed so much to their churches and communities, remained at the front of advocacy for women's rights in North Carolina. Several years ago they were collectively honored through interviews conducted with them. A dramatic presentation of their experiences and their opinions, *Coffeehouse of the Spirit*, was created by the late Sister Evelyn Mattern of the Council staff, who had guided them through their many efforts. This committee acted in the name of Christ to recognize and proclaim the right of women to serve on equal terms with men within and outside of the church.

In viewing the status of women throughout the world, we find an even more disturbing picture of what needs to be accomplished. In 1995, I attended the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing, China. Women came from all parts of the world to allow their voices to be heard in the forums. An amazing atmosphere of trust developed as we came to realize our common hopes, dreams, and problems. We sought to carry our concerns and demands to the ears of those making the crucial decisions and forming the declarations that would come out of this historic gathering. The truth was out: women across the world in all societies were discriminated against, left out of decision-making processes, and numbered with the poor and the voiceless. Not a place in the world could declare truthfully that women and men were totally at par, recognized fully as equals in every way. Nor could any place say that women were provided equal entry into every government, business, or education endeavor, or into the many faith institutions around the world. Every faith had its bias against women's leadership.

While it is not the calling of governments to be communities of faith, it is incumbent upon those of us who do belong to such communities to insist upon just treatment of all. Within the church, we can do no less than continue to work for full inclusion of women and all those who have been placed outside the circle. If we are the representatives of Jesus witnessing to his teachings, we must seek to emulate the way that he relates to those who come to him. We can seek to be as accepting, as welcoming, as strong an advocate for God's justice and peace as the One who is featured in the gospels we read and study. We begin locally, here in North Carolina, but what we do has wider effects beyond our state boundaries. Whether we live in rural or urban settings, small towns or larger communities, we are invited to the lunch counter with Jesus and to be heard.

WORSHIP AID – 'SHE HAS SHOWN GREAT LOVE'

RESPONSIVE READINGS

One: Come and celebrate God who calls women to tend the flame.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

One: Come and celebrate the courage of women who heard their call and, with a fire in their bones, stepped out of the shadow.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

One: Come and celebrate the lives of women who, even in their mountaintop experiences, never forgot their valleys.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

One: Come and celebrate the work of women who recognized the risen Lord in the breaking of bread and in the opening of scripture.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

One: Come and celebrate the perseverance of women who are still struggling to have their gifts recognized by their churches.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

One: Come and celebrate women who paved the road to ordination for others and encourage us to work for those who will follow.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

Amen.

(by Su Yon Pak, from "Celebrate the Gifts of Women," PCUSA, www.pcusa.org/women/celebratethegifts/celebrate06.pdf)

A Litany of Remembrance

Let us remember and give thanks for faithful women of God, that their lives may inspire ours.

For Miriam, prophet who led the women of Israel in rejoicing at their deliverance from Egypt;

For the unnamed woman who acted as prophet and anointed Jesus before his burial;

God of abundant life,

We give you thanks.

That we may claim our gifts of leadership and have courage to announce your truth by our words and actions,

God of graceful power,

We offer our prayer.

For women mystics of the Middle Ages: for Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila, and Julian of Norwich, who used many names and images to praise you and tell of your goodness and love;

God of abundant life,

We give you thanks.

That we may know you more deeply and praise you as one God with many names;

God of graceful power,

We offer our prayer.

For the women of this country who fought against slavery and worked for justice for all people: for Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks; for the women who struggled for women's rights: for Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony;

God of abundant life,

We give you thanks.

That we may be empowered to strive for justice and peace among all people;

God of graceful power,

We offer our prayer.

Amen.

(Adapted from "Litany of Remembrance" by Rev. Dr. Ruth A. Meyers, *Women's Uncommon Prayers*, Geitz, Burke, Smith, editors, Council of Women's Ministries of the Episcopal Church USA, Morehouse Publishing, 2000, p. 340.)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

- | | |
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| ✓ Christ, From Whom All Blessings Flow | UMH 550/AM 529 |
| ✓ Faith of Our Mothers | CM 430/AM 193 |
| ✓ Help Us To Accept Each Other | CH 487/UMH 560/PH 358/
AM 558/NCH 388 |
| ✓ Of Women and of Women's Hopes We Sing | CH 686 |
| ✓ We Are Your People | NCH 309/PH 436/MW 514 |

w Hymnal Legend w

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| † UMH – United Methodist Hymnal |
| † PH – Presbyterian Hymnal |
| † MW – Moravian Book of Worship |
| † AM – African Methodist Episcopal |
| † CM – Christian Methodist Episcopal |
| † CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ) |
| † NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC) |

ADDITIONAL PRAYER

Truth and Falsehood

IT IS NOT TRUE that women should feel and experience that being a woman is of secondary value to the community.
THIS IS TRUE that women are created women, in the image of God, co-workers with God in caring for life, in struggling for the liberations of humanity and for a world order that respects each one's dignity.

IT IS NOT TRUE that women--and men--must remain divided by sexism, racism, economic injustices and imperialism.
THIS IS TRUE that all women and men are called to be in solidarity with each other's struggle for dignity and justice, to learn from one another and to challenge one another as sisters and brothers in critical and prophetic solidarity.

IT IS NOT TRUE that becoming a refugee is acceptable and inevitable for millions of women and their children.
THIS IS TRUE that the whole people of God are called to denounce militarism, to challenge the root causes of poverty in the name of the God of Hagar, who as a refugee was the first person who dared to give God a name.

IT IS NOT TRUE that women should accept rape and incest, battering and humiliation, as the fate of women.
THIS IS TRUE that Jesus Christ has come into the world to heal the broken community between women and men, to restore our sense of self, dignity and inclusion.

IT IS NOT TRUE that young girls should not be given the opportunity to learn to read, to write, and to analyze the developments of their countries.

THIS IS TRUE that everyone is called to respond to the gift of life and to the needs of our community with all our heart, all our soul and all our reason.

IT IS NOT TRUE that sexual slavery, bondage and prostitution cannot be counteracted or eliminated.

THIS IS TRUE that Jesus Christ has come into the world to overturn the tables of injustice, that women and men, empowered by the Holy Spirit, should challenge poverty and patriarchal culture.

IT IS NOT TRUE that women and men cannot live in mutual and just relationships, respecting one another's integrity and personhood.

THIS IS TRUE that God the Creator has given us the responsibility and trust to care for all of creation in humility and faithfulness, to work and to love as co-creators of God.

Amen.

(from the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/worship/genderjustice.htm)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

• QUOTES •

The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says, "It's a girl."

Shirley Chisholm

You don't have to be anti-man to be pro-woman.

Jane Galvin Lewis

Just as we fooled ourselves that the end of discriminatory laws would soon lead to racial harmony, so we thought that increased access to education, advancement and male-only arenas would erase the attitudes that have led some men to treat women like children, fools and punching bags.

Anna Quindlen

As all advocates of feminist politics know, most people do not understand sexism; or, if they do, they think it is not a problem. Masses of people think that feminism is always and only about women seeking to be equal to men. And a huge majority of these folks think feminism is anti-male. Their misunderstanding of feminist politics reflects the reality that most folks learn about feminism from patriarchal mass media.

bell hooks

• PERSONAL VIGNETTE •

THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN NORTH CAROLINA CHURCHES

EDITED, FROM THE WOMAN'S COFFEEHOUSE OF SPIRIT, COMPILED BY EVELYN MATTERN, S.F.C.C.

The following is an anonymous true story about a Presbyterian woman's experience within her church.

We started going to the Presbyterian church when I was in sixth grade. I loved it, everything about it. I knew early on that I wanted to work there. I can remember late at night preaching sermons as I went to sleep and, when the minister was preaching, saying things in my head, finding ways to say it better than he did.

As I grew up, I first thought, "I'll need to be a minister's wife, that's what I'll need to be. I'll have to go find me a minister to marry." Then it became, "Oh, I'll be a missionary, because women can be missionaries." Then our church hired a Director of Christian Education, so I was going to be a Director of Christian Education. That's about where I was when I went off to college. In college, our campus Director of Christian Education went to seminary, and I also met my first associate female pastor. Immediately, I said, "That's going to be me."

I entered seminary and began dating a man who would eventually become my husband. While in seminary together, we each did our internship at the same church in Tennessee. I did one year, and he did the next. We were both studying feminist theology, and we had the exact same job title, exact same pay, everything. I was put under the direction of the associate pastor, who was a female and a great mentor to me. I was put in charge of the youth group. I did very little in the pulpit and went on some home visitations with her, but not much. At the end of the summer, I was given a beautifully hand made card, with pictures of me and the youth group, and a t-shirt.

The next summer, my boyfriend, doing the same internship, was put under the care of the senior pastor—a man, so it was not totally inappropriate—but that also meant that he was in the pulpit every Sunday. And he did visitation with the senior pastor and very little youth work. At the end of the summer, he was given an official letter of thanks from the session. How we were reinforced in that same position was very curious. I got the warm fuzzies but nothing formal or official. He didn't get the warm fuzzies but got the formal. We thought about how we would both have liked both kinds of affirmations. Later, when we were married, even serving as co-pastors, we saw those kinds of reinforcements over and over.

One year, after I participated in the installation of a pastor in our town, one woman came up to me and said, "It was really neat to see a woman up there. You know, when you were up there, I thought: one day maybe our church should try to have a woman associate." And I said, "Oh, I look forward to the day when you have a woman head of staff." You would have thought I had hit her in the face. Her smile dropped, she took a step back, and the conversation finished. She walked away as if I had insulted her. It was as if there was only one box for a woman to be in.

A church in Chapel Hill has a female head of staff and often has female interns from Duke Divinity School. One Sunday they had a male as a guest preacher. One five year old leaned over and whispered, "Mom, can men be ministers too?" Often a parent will tell me a story about a child imitating me, for example, by wearing a scarf like a stole and saying, "Look, I'm like pastor P____." That may mean that little girls—and little boys too—grow up knowing not only that they could be ministers, but that they could be whatever they want to be, and create their own image of what that is.

• CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES •

- W www.nccouncilofchurches.org/areasofwork/issues/gender/gender_issue.htm—North Carolina Council of Churches' gender page. This link describes the Council's focus on this issue as well as providing resources, links to similar sites, and a short explanation of "Why People of Faith Should Care."
- W <http://wnc-woman.com>—Western North Carolina Woman, a print/online publication of Infinite Circles, Inc. The mission of Western North Carolina Woman is to celebrate the inherent strength, wisdom, and grace of women. The print publication and the resources available on the website provide a hub through which women can be interconnected, interdependent, and interactive. Articles and columns focus on creative problem solving and the sharing of ideas, information, inspiration, and joy.
- W www.ncwu.org—North Carolina Women United, a coalition of progressive organizations and individuals working to achieve the full political, social, and economic equality of all women across North Carolina. NCWU works to build women's power through grassroots activism, community organizing, legislative advocacy, and engagement in the political process.
- W www.doa.state.nc.us/cfw/cfw.htm—North Carolina Council for Women & Domestic Violence Commission, an advocacy agency that is housed in the state's Department of Administration. This agency advises the governor, the North Carolina legislature, and the state departments on the special needs of women in North Carolina by: identifying and

assessing needs; collecting and distributing information about the status of women; acting as a resource for local Councils/Commissions for Women; collaborating with other groups and individuals working on behalf of women; identifying and assessing statewide needs, including domestic violence; and assuring that necessary services, policies, and programs are provided to those in need and strengthening existing programs.

- W www.ncjournalforwomen.com—The North Carolina Journal for Women, an online publication providing women with inspirational, informative and intriguing content. The Journal serves women who come from diverse backgrounds across the region and is dedicated to those who serve as the backbone of families, organizations, communities, and companies across the state.
- W www.rcwms.org The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South weaves feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. While it began to support and connect women who understand their lives and work as ministers, RCWMS now provides a wide variety of programs on feminism, faith, creativity, spirituality, and justice.
- W www.nwhp.org—National Women’s History Project, an educational nonprofit organization. NWHP’s mission is to recognize and celebrate the diverse and historic accomplishments of women by providing information and educational materials and programs.
- W www.womensorganizations.org—National Council of Women’s Organizations, a nonpartisan, nonprofit umbrella organization of groups that collectively represent over ten million women across the United States. The only national coalition of its kind, NCWO is a tax-exempt organization with twenty years’ experience uniting American women’s groups. It was established in 1982 in response to the expiration of the deadline for ERA ratification. The NCWO’s ERA Task Force was established in 1999.
- W www.un.org/womenwatch/daw—United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women is grounded in the vision of equality of the United Nations Charter and advocates the improvement of the status of women of the world and the achievement of their equality with men. Aiming to ensure the participation of women as equal partners with men in all aspects of human endeavor, the Division promotes women as equal participants and beneficiaries of sustainable development, peace and security, governance and human rights. Its website contains a vast collection of resources centering upon women’s issues around the world.

KEY FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

- q Using data from the 2000 Census, the American Association of University Women calculates that in North Carolina, the median annual income of women with a high school education is only 74 percent of men’s earnings with the same level of education. The NC wage gap actually increases when comparing those with college-level education; here, women’s median annual income is only 68 percent of men’s. The current wage gap in NC is 36th-worst in the nation. At the current rate, NC will not achieve pay equity across gender lines until 2048.¹
- q North Carolina is one of only 15 states that has refused to adopt the Equal Rights Amendment, which holds that “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”²
- q Worldwide, men continue to earn much more than women who are doing equal work. In the U.S., the Equal Pay Act was signed in 1963, but the wage gap has been closing at an extremely slow rate. In 1963, women who worked year-round on a full-time basis made 59 cents on average for every dollar earned by men. In 2004, women earned 77 cents to the dollar. That means that the wage gap has narrowed by a less than half a cent per year. Using the annual growth rate of women’s earnings over the last 10 years, it is projected that the U.S. will not achieve earnings equality until 2056.³
- q Economist Evelyn Murphy, president of The Wage Project, estimates that over a lifetime (47 years of full-time work) this gap amounts to a loss in women’s wages of \$700,000 for a high school graduate, \$1.2 million for a college graduate, and \$2 million for a professional school graduate.⁴
- q The world’s resources are very unevenly distributed, not only between countries, but also between men and women within countries. While it is estimated that women perform two-thirds of the world’s work, they only earn one-tenth of the income, and own less than one per cent of the world’s property.⁵

- q In 1979, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is commonly referred to as an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention defines discrimination against women as “...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”⁶
- q As of March 2006, 182 countries, representing over 90 percent of total U.N. membership, are party to the Convention. However, the U.S. has not ratified CEDAW, one of the few nations in the world not to do so. Nations such as Afghanistan, China, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Mexico, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa have all ratified the Convention.⁷
- q By accepting the Convention, nations commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including:
- To incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women;
 - To establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and
 - To ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.⁸

The Bible and Gender⁹

The collection of 66 books written over a period of 1,000 years that we know as the Bible does not speak to the range of issues affecting women in a unified voice. Women are portrayed (primarily by male authors) in a variety of ways, some positively and some negatively. The contemporary task of interpreting these issues, including gender equality, through the lens of Scripture often proves daunting, and many churches remain silent or muted on these issues. Great discernment and wisdom must be exercised when interpreting challenging texts. However, for all of its complexity, the Bible remains consistent and clear on several key theological points. First, both women and men are created equally in God’s image. Second, God is neither male nor female; God is not gendered and must not be represented as male or female. When it comes to Christology, we cannot attribute male gender to Christ’s divine nature, but only to his human nature. Thus, gender itself is not determinative of a person’s ability or fitness to represent God.

1. American Association of University Women, “Gains in Learning, Gaps in Earnings,” www.aauw.org/research/statedata.

2. Equal Rights Amendment, www.equalrightsamendment.org.

3. National Committee on Pay Equity, “The Wage Gap Over Time: In Real Dollars, Women See a Continuing Gap,” www.pay-equity.org/info-time.html.

4. Ibid.

5. UNICEF, “Gender Equality: The Big Picture,” www.unicef.org/gender/index_bigpicture.html.

6. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, “CEDAW,” www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Adapted from Rebecca Merrill Groothuis’ article, “The Bible and Gender Equality,” www.cbeinternational.org/new/pdf_files/free_articles/groothuis_bible_genderequailty.pdf.