

## **What Jesus taught about women** **„In a men’s world he demonstrated that this is God’s world!“**

The role and the place of women is very different all over the world, also in modern time.

The role and the place of women is also very different in the religions and the cultures which exist in our world.

And: The role and the place of women is even different in the Christian churches. May they exist since several hundred years, like the Catholic church.

Or may they exist since only some hundred years like the Protestant Churches, the evangelical or Pentecostal movements, we have since more than 100 years, and the younger churches.

### **What Jesus taught about women**

In the teaching and practicing of Jesus we can recognize, how Jesus, the son of GOD, sees women.

We can trust and be secure that Jesus lived the will of God totally, 100 percent.

Whatever he did, however he reacted: it was totally in God’s will.

He never failed or considered something ungodly.

Jesus was there, when God created the earth and as the final crown of creation: the man and the woman.

### **1. Jesus lived out the equality of men and women**

When we say, he lived out, it means he taught something by practicing it, but also by speaking it out.

When Jesus lived on this earth in Israel, it was a world of and for men, a men’s world. But he taught about God’s world, about the Kingdom of God.

What were the characteristics of the “men’s” world at that time?

**Women were regarded with other and less value than men.**

**Concerning responsibilities and privileges women were seen lower than men.**

**When it comes to functions and authority-structures, women are treated differently and lesser.**

***How Jesus acted, was correcting this.***

His behavior was totally otherwise than it was at that time in the society and the religious world.

How he behaved was really **radical**.

Radical comes from latin “radice”, root. Jesus referred to the roots.

He referred to creation, what God intended with the creation of mankind in two sexes, in two forms.

**Let us have a look to creation.**

Jesus was there and he knew about everything, what was going on in creation.

He heard and saw, he was part of it!

### **A. Concerning value**

Genesis 1, 26a: Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness,  
Mankind, men and women have the same value: Made in the image of God!  
Another verse says (Genesis 2,7):

*The LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

The woman was made out of the man, so she is of the same kind: a living being, in her body life from the eternal God, in the same way like men!

### **B. Concerning responsibilities and privileges**

Genesis 1, 26b: ... *so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.*"

Men and women are created to rule together over the earth, over that, what God has created.

### **C. Concerning functions and authority-structures**

God created men and women as partners, not to rule over each other.

Genesis 2, 18 and 20 it says, how God created the female, the woman:

The Lord God said, *"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

God saw: There was something not good with the one man, with the men, he wanted to have on the earth!

God created a helper suitable for him.

We do not have the word helpmeet her, in the sense of a devoted servant.

The Hebrew word **Suitable HELPER which is used here** means EZER, **aw-zar** is the root-word, with the addition *kenegdo*, *ezer kenegdo*

The meaning is: There is "one who is the same as the other and who surrounds, protects, aids, helps, supports."

Or: There is someone "from face to face" with the man, on the same level.

The EZER is filling out what the other does not have or cannot achieve.

There is no hierarchy,

There is no indication of inferiority or of a secondary position

There is no indication of a separation of the male and female responsibility, authority, or social position.

The word *ezer* is used twice in the Old Testament (in the creation report) to refer to the female and 14 times to refer to God.

For example, in the Psalms when David says, "The Lord is my Helper," he uses the word *ezer*.

**What was typical in the Jewish culture, in the society, in the Jewish religion, when Jesus was living on this earth?**

**We need to know about this to get a feeling and a knowledge, how radical and revolutionary he was for that time.**

One can say: To describe the contrast: the view of women during that time in Israel and the surrounding heathen nations was black, and how Jesus behaved and talked and taught was white!

His deepest enemies were the religious people, who should know better, because they had the Old Testament, the scriptures, the LAW, the word of God!

**There were “oral laws”, layed down in the Talmud, the law which was reported by mouth:**

- Let the words of the Law be burned rather than committed to women.
- A woman is inferior to her husband in all things.
- Jewish thanksgiving prayer says: Praised be God, that he created me not a woman.
- It is well for those whose children are male, but ill for those whose children are female.

**Social practice at Jesus time:**

- Visit of the temple in Jerusalem: Women were limited to one outer portion.
- A Rabbi regarded it beneath his dignity to speak to a woman in public.
- Women were kept for childbearing and kept under the strict control of a man.

**What of these behaviours we do see even today?**

In the Church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ?

I mean not in the Islam! I mean in our evangelistic churches!

These practices reflected the sinful nature of humanity, resulting from the fall. These practices also show that the thinking of the people of Israel was corrupted with heathen or gentile thinking. Their thinking was: Women are evil, inferior, unclean, un-equal.

**Jesus rejected through his behavior that women are evil, inferior, unclean and unequal.**

- **Nowhere the writers of the Bible, of the Gospel portray women as being of better value than men.**
- **Nowhere women are restricted to certain roles and**
- **nowhere women are treated as the property of men or subjects under male authority.**

**Jesus demonstrated most vigorously that men and women are equal.**

## **2. Jesus taught that women are not property!**

This lesson comes from the encounter which Jesus had with the religious leaders, which is recorded in John 8, 3-11

*The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”*

*They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”*

*Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

### **Leaders brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in adultery.**

An act against the law, to be punished. But the partner was not included in the accusation of the Pharisees. The law is written in Deuteronomy (5.Mose) 22,23-30. And after the law the “partner” of adultery is always included, to be stoned or another punishment.

When reading this we put the focus on this: The Pharisees want to trap Jesus. But we have to put it into the viewpoint of the thinking of the religious leaders of that time.

Religious law: A woman is the property of her man.

The real sin for the Pharisees was not the sin per se, but that the property of a man was damaged! The sin was, that the “owner” of the woman had been violated through the adultery.

Parallel in moslemic society today in Germany: called Matter of honor, the family is violated, when a Turkish girl does not marry or love the man the family wants. “Honor Killings” happen.

According to the thinking of the teachers of law, the woman was now considered a source of disgrace to her owner and was so no longer worthy of life.

According to the law, the women’s partner had also to be stoned.

The reason was not, that he violated the woman sexually, but that he had misused another man’s property.

Jesus did not treat the women as a property. He treated her as an equal human being. As a person of great value.

He showed respect for her, spoke with tenderness and compassion.

He did not condemn or judge her. He just told her that it was a sin, what she did. And that should leave her lifestyle.

You can imagine how much this lifted the woman!

### **3. Jesus taught that women are more important than religion**

Jesus showed the great value of women by healing one of them.

Matthew 9,20-22: *Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.*

The healing of this woman offended the religious leaders and the religious rules.

He showed that the value of one woman is far more than the value of religious rules.

The woman suffered of a female blood problem.

She had no chance for help from no side. And she was excluded from religious participation her life long.

Jesus disregarded two rules of the jewish law through healing her:

- He spoke to the woman, which was not allowed.
- He allowed the woman to touch her, which made him unclean after the law, (Leviticus - 3<sup>rd</sup> Mose – 15, 19 and 25-27)

Jesus valued this needy woman and risked rejection and challenged their understanding of womanhood.

What he did not is: He did not diagnose the cause of her sickness concerning religious rules or her husband.

What he did is: He simply healed her!

One point more: Jesus did it for a simple woman, who could not give back to him, Jesus had no benefit from the risk, he took over through her healing. He was demonstrating God's heart. He paid a price, for what is right before God and in HIS will.

#### **4. Women are equal partners with men in marriage**

Jesus teaching in this area was totally foreign to the religious and cultural rules of that days!

In this area Jesus kicked over "sacred cows".

Matthew 19, 1-11

*When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."*

*"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."*

*The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given."*

Jews at that time lived a double standard towards marriage and divorce, rooted in the idea: Women are of less value than men and are considered as a property.

So men were allowed to divorce a wife for very slight and trivial things.

NOT so the wife! She was not allowed to divorce at all!

Jesus rejected this double standard.

He taught: Marriage is not a relationship for the benefit of a man.

It is mutual, with equal privileges and rights, equal responsibility and authority.

The question of the Pharisees refers to Deuteronomy 24,1 (5. Mose)

*If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,*

Married men at the time of Jesus used this law very easily

Jesus goes back to the beginning! He speaks about the intention of creation, that a man and a woman should live a lifelong relationship, this is the divine model!

He underlines, that divorce is allowed because hardness of heart.

But the model still remains: It is the model, which was set before the fall, before sin came into the world.

## **5. Women are to have equal authority in ministry**

Jesus really turned the Jewish world upside down through his teaching, behavior and practice. He did not follow the rules of culture and religion, when it came to distinguishing between men and women, what they could do and what not.

He broke down the wall of separation between between the sexes.

Eph. 2,14: For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

And Gal. 3,28: There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The scripture is in John 4,1-26, 39-42

The encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman gives much insight about women and authority in ministry.

Besides: It is the longest speech of Jesus, which is recorded – and it is with a woman. How he talked

Jesus reveals himself to her as the long awaited Messiah, to her, a woman, which was several times divorced, and not living in a proper marriage.

For a women's day an actrice prepared a drama of this encounter with Jesus. It was so touching that immediately after the beginning of the play tears appeared in the eyes of the women. Women can identify, what it means to be addressed by Jesus. This women, after Jesus had talked to her, went back to her village and told everyone about Jesus!

Jesus did not hinder her. He was not concerned, that it was a women who was proclaiming the most valuable message at that time and for the Jews – and even Samaritans – that HE is the Messiah!

Jesus did not restrict her, only to speak to other women or children in her village. She was in no way restricted.

Jesus broke at least three laws, which exist at that time, to meet with this woman:

- As a Jew, he was not permitted to speak to a Samaritan.
- As a man he was not allowed to speak in public with a woman.
- As a teacher, a Rabbi, he knew that it was prohibited for him to teach a women about theology.

In other words: He called the woman to function in the same wise as he could have legally called a man to function!

No wonder that the disciples marveled that Jesus talked to her.

Amazing result of her evangelization (John4, 39):

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."

Maybe this was the groundwork for the great revival which happened later in Samaria.

## **6. Women can represent God**

Jesus often referred to God as father.

This seems to be the only frame of reference, the church uses to understand God.

But Jesus did not limit God to this single male image.

Argument in the church: Only men can represent God, because they are male, and God is male, a father.

On two occasions he gives a picture of God in feminine terms.

He compares his own desire to protect Jerusalem with the protection of a mother, see Matth. 23,37, Luke 13,34.

It is part of God's character, to be protective like a mother, and this character is reflected in men and women.

Story about the woman and her lost coin (Luke 15, 8-10).

Jesus uses very clearly the image of a woman to portrait God.

There are certain things to consider, when we picture God:

– The idea of God as father is a metaphor, a tool of communication.

Used in a man-ruled culture, surrounded by heathens, Pagans, it helps to understand that the Lord of Israel is personal and loving, not requiring sacrifices, to calm him, to be relieved from fear. Israel's God was like a father, but more than an earthly father.

– When we see God only as father, we can tend to limit him to one metaphor. He is more than we can imagine!

– We are not allowed to make God in our own image, it does not matter which image we choose. God is much more!

– The Israelites were not allowed to create any image as a likeness of God.

The fact is: God is Spirit! Neither male nor female. We can limit him through our language. Language is never big enough to describe God. It is never good to argue in debates over metaphors or language to "get" God.

## **7 Women are equal according to God's family values**

To keep up family values is much needed in our society today.

Jesus gives us a perspective on this, what is easily overlooked. But on what Jesus gives input, this is what is valuable.

Lets read Luke 8,19-21: *Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."*

Is Jesus not rebuking his mother Mary and his brothers by blood, like James?

No, Jesus just redefines the meaning of the terms mother and brothers, because they are mostly defined by roles, by predestined roles. The role for a woman was to submit and to serve. The role of men to rule or lead. This defines, what a person cannot do or can do.

Isn't this the same in the church: There are roles, and there is a secondary, servant role for women, equal what her gifts may be. Only a rebellious woman would resist or override this role.

What does Jesus say? He says that his birth-mother and birth-brothers do not have favoured status, because of their gender or familial relationships. He states instead that what determines relationship with him is attentiveness to God's word, regard for his word. This defines the Family of God!!

And this means: the honor which refers to mother and brothers, is an honor which can be extended equally to every person. Jesus acted and taught against gender-restricted roles, in all, how he reacted regarding womanhood.

### **8. Women are not to be relegated to the kitchen**

In Luke 10. 38-42 Jesus demonstrates his rejection of the notion of female roles. It is the story of his friends Mary and Martha.

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one.<sup>6</sup> Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

Jesus praises Mary for her listening, and he withholds praise from Martha for her diligence.

Scholars say: Through this Jesus shows regard for Mary first as person, and not first as woman. He allows her to set her priorities in life more than the cultural expectations of gender roles. This is profound!

Mary's choice was to sit at the feet of Jesus. What means the position of a disciple or student at that time. She did, what was allowed only to men! Jesus not only allowed this, he commented that she had chosen the better part. Jesus treated her as a human being, not as performer of a role, to which belonged subordination and submission to the culture.

And Martha: She was submissive that a woman's place is in the kitchen. Jesus did not show approval for her behavior.

### **9 Women are not to be measured by motherhood**

Jesus behavior and teaching was radical. I wonder what comments he would give today – in churches in our different nations, in our society!

Look what Jesus teaches in Luke 1,27-28:

*As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."*

Jesus had cast out a demon and was teaching about demonic power.

One lady called out spontaneously, how happy his mother must have been to have given birth to him.

Jesus rebuked this in not a gentle way. The order of the Greek words here indicate that it was sharp and severe. He seems to be deeply troubled, because this input of the lady indicated that women were reduced to "childbearing" as the essence of a female life. Jesus was not at all demeaning childbearing, this wonderful thing!

Women cannot be reduced and treated as "wombs".



Jesus states clearly: Women are not to be measured in terms of motherhood. The highest and the most blessed is the relationship to God and to obey him.

### **10. Women can be apostles**

Today in many churches women can minister in public. But when it comes to positions of authority, the responsible persons put emphasis on institutional authority or structures.

Example: The German Pentecostal movement: no ordination of women as pastors – with the same education and the same responsibilities in a church, although it was decided in the 70<sup>th</sup>. Women were ordained as pastoral assistants. It came, when the authorities accepted the title “pastor” officially and the Pentecostal movement was accepted as an official church.

Not guided by the Holy Spirit and callings and gifts, but by human reasoning.

Apostle is considered the most authoritative of the “office” of the five-fold ministry.

Here are some fundamental errors or misunderstandings:

- Apostle: The meaning in Greek is simply: one who is sent! Nothing in it speaks about authority over others.
- Office: This word does not exist in the NT. Also not in Tim. 3,1, where it is translated “office of a bishop”, in a modern English translation it says more exactly: *Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.*

**Five-fold-ministry:** Not given as model of government in the church. Eph. 4, 11-12 says, that there are persons who are a gift from God, not to govern, but to equip: So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, the task to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. The other reference is 1. Corinthians 12, where it says that God has placed apostles etc.

In some Pentecostal movements women can minister, be leading pastors in their local church, but cannot function in the highest office of the hierarchical ladder. This is reserved for men.

**This cannot be justified with the Bible.**

Being real biblical, we have to look, what „apostle“ means in the NT!

Apostle is a person, who is sent from God to deliver the Gospel.

There were the twelve apostles, which Jesus sent. They were ongoing apostles, because they were sent to spread the Gospel over all the world.

Very interesting that Jesus let women spread the news of his resurrection!

We find this in Matthew 28,1-10. Mary Magdalene and another Mary went to the tomb, where the angel of the Lord was. He reported to them that Jesus has risen from the dead. And then Jesus appeared later to them, what means, Jesus appeared first to women. Saying: *“Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*

This was not by accident, but with purpose. Jesus and the angel of the Lord could have easily chosen one of the disciples for this commission: “Go and tell!”

As women they were sent to tell the brothers. Their message was the biggest fact in history, the resurrection of the Lord! And the audience was not women, but men.

This is revolutionary, because at that time, both for the Romans and the Jews the testimony of a woman was not permitted as evidence! Jesus was cutting down prejudices, which have surely been inside the 11 disciples.

They seem to have kept this in their hearts, because in the first Church there have been female apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors and evangelists.

They were lucky not to have structures and hierarchies like we have now in our churches. But always, when there are times of outpouring of the Spirit, structures do not play any more a role and men and women minister after God's calling and gifts. We see this in China and other countries, where there is revival.

**Our hope is to see revival in Europe, and may they be all part of it:  
men and women, young and old, all nationalities.  
Because the harvest is so rich!**

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