



P A R T 1

FOUNDATIONS

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

—Romans 1:18–19

When Jesus was at a critical juncture in his ministry, he took his closest followers aside and asked them a very simple yet profound question: “Who do people say that I am?” (Mark 8:27). When they gave him a variety of answers, Jesus, even more pointedly, followed up with another question: “But who do *you* say that I am?” (v. 29). In the end, Jesus’ point was that every person must come to their own decision regarding Jesus’ identity, regardless of what anyone else says about him.

Over the centuries there has been no more influential or controversial figure than Jesus. At the beginning of the last century, the German theologian Albert Schweitzer chronicled the variegated portraits of Jesus in his famous *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.¹ After several hundred pages of survey of other scholars’ opinions on Jesus, Schweitzer concluded that their understanding depended considerably more on their own contexts and biases than on the actual testimony of Scripture. For many, Schweitzer concluded, looking for the historical Jesus was like looking in the mirror—what they saw was not Jesus but themselves.²

1. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (London: A. & C. Black, 1968).

2. See also H. Osborne, ed., *Whom Do Men Say That I Am? A Collection of the Views of the Most Notable Christian and Non-Christian Modern Authors about Jesus of Nazareth*

In a sense, this book represents a kind of sequel to Schweitzer's work but with a more narrow focus: chronicling the *feminist* quest of the historical Jesus. We will see that what emerges from feminist scholarship on Jesus is not *one version* of the true Jesus but many different accounts of who feminists perceive Jesus to be. This strikingly confirms Schweitzer's diagnosis of the scholarship he surveyed. A full century after him, people still claim to reconstruct Jesus "as he really was," resulting in a large variety of portraits even among those who share a basic feminist viewpoint.

These divergent understandings of Jesus found among feminists, in turn, raise concerns regarding the viability of feminism at large. Since feminists are not able to come to an essential consensus on Jesus' true identity, the validity of feminist biblical interpretation itself comes into question. The evidence shows that the feminist quest for self-fulfillment and self-realization leads to a distortion of the message of the Bible. In an attempt to fit Jesus into their feminist mold, feminists are ultimately kept from experiencing the fulfillment they are seeking, the joy that comes only from living life in keeping with God's truth as revealed in his Word.

The message of the Bible for us as women is certainly vital, though often countercultural. Attention to its teaching is essential for us to live spiritually vibrant lives in a world that vies for compromise, accommodation, and independence from the authority structures in which God wants us to serve. In the case studies that follow, I have tried to supply you with the facts—the story of these women and their views of Jesus—so that you can form your own opinion as to whether their positions are tenable and biblical. As you read on, monitor attentively how the answer given by various feminist writers to Jesus' question, "But who do *you* say that I am?" squares with the biblical answer: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

(London: Faber & Faber, 1932), which, among others, includes selections by A. Harnack, J. H. Newman, G. K. Chesterton, D. F. Strauss, L. Tolstoi, F. Nietzsche, B. Russell, E. Renan, R. Browning, M. Arnold, G. B. Shaw, H. G. Wells, and D. H. Lawrence.