

Today we come to our second last look at a woman whose place in the story of the people of God has been overlooked. So far we have thought about: Deborah the general; Miriam the worship leader; Huldah the prophet; Rizpah the protestor; Mary the mother; and, Tabitha the indispensable. Today, and next week, we'll think about someone else who is mentioned in this final chapter of Romans where Paul takes the opportunity to thank people who have helped him in serving Jesus. Today I want to think about Junia. It's not that straightforward though.

I am conscious that the question of women in leadership has been controversial over the years; after all, it is only in my lifetime that women have been ordained into ministry in the Church of Scotland. There are still denominations and congregations that do not accept women into leadership positions. So, talking about Junia in that context raises issues for some people.

Not only that, this verse has some issues relating to how to translate it, and what that translation actually means. So, why choose to talk about her? Well, I think it is important to confirm that there is a place for women in leadership and ministry, and that the church would be much worse off without their input.

Let's look at some of the translation issues:

NIV *Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.* The original edition of the NIV used Junias but in 2011 changed it to Junia.

AMPC *Remember me to Andronicus and Junias, my **tribal kinsmen** and once my fellow prisoners. They are **men held in high esteem** among the apostles, who also were in Christ before I was.*

CEV *Greet **my relatives** Andronicus and Junias, who were in jail with me. They are **highly respected** by the apostles and were followers of Christ before I was.*

ESV *Greet Andronicus and Junia, **my kinsmen** and my fellow prisoners. They are **well known to the apostles**, and they were in Christ before me.*

MSG *Hello to **my cousins** Andronicus and Junias. We once shared a jail cell. They were believers in Christ before I was. Both of them **are outstanding leaders**.*

NLV *Greet Andronicus and Junias. They are from **my family** and were in prison with me. They put their trust in Christ before I did. They have been **respected missionaries**.*

It's a short verse but you can see from these different ways to interpret it the exact meaning is not always clear. There are two words I want to use which I want to explain a little: eisegesis and exegesis.

Eisegesis is the process of interpreting text in such a way as to introduce one's own presuppositions, agendas or biases. It is commonly referred to as reading into the text.

Exegesis an explanation of a text, especially from the bible, after its careful study

So, if you believe that women should not have a leadership role you might ‘read the text’ from that perspective – therefore Junia could not be female and an apostle. Junias could be because Junias is the male form of the name. Because the word used could be either male or female, other aspects of your theology, or the theology of bible translators, could be introduced.

Brethren not allowing women to speak 1 Tim 2:12 *I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.* but

1 Cor 11 ‘when a woman prays or prophesies’ – this is eisegesis, reading into the text. Take your core text and ask what other bible passages are relevant here? If this is the only one that says this, how does that fit with everything else? If other verses say the opposite then we need to work out what is going on?

Acts 2:17-18 *“In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”*

Let’s start with the easy bit from today’s verse – they were people who had come to faith before Paul. It is though that Paul’s conversion was a couple of years after Pentecost, so Andronicus and Junia had been converted in the very early days of the church.

Paul calls them something that is translated as relatives, fellow Jews, cousins or family members. In a sense it doesn’t really matter too much which of these you go with. These were people Paul respected and who were close to him.

They were also people who had been in prison because of their faith in Christ. Paul was jailed as many as seven times and it is assumed that on one of these occasions Andronicus and Junia were in the same prison. Most of the commentators who accept that it is Junia would submit that the two were likely married and in ministry together.

The last thing the verse talks about is the issue of apostleship. As I said, if your theology prevents women in leadership this will be a challenge.

For the first 1200 years of the church it was accepted that Junia was female and that women could have exactly the same leadership roles and ministry as men. I’m not sure what happened, but it has taken a long time to rectify that thinking in some places.

What is an apostle though? The word is used in three ways in the bible: it sometimes simply means messenger, but that is not the sense here; it is also used of the 12 who were chosen by Jesus, but here it cannot mean them; we also read of other apostles – Barnabas, James, Silas and, of course, Paul. These were people who saw the big picture of the spread of the church and the necessity of forming and establishing groups of believers in congregations. Some

claim that it was necessary for a ‘true apostle’ to have seen Jesus and to have been sent out by him. In that case, the ministry and place of Apostles would have died out and it is difficult, therefore, to explain why these others are known as apostles and why in Ephesians 4:11-13 Paul writes ¹¹ *So Christ himself gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers,* ¹² *to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up* ¹³ *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

These five gifts or appointments for the church are given to different individuals for use within the church and the world. These are essentially five different types of leadership which Jesus has given to build the church. A wider question is whether they are natural or supernatural gifts? My answer is that they are a bit of both. God gives each person gifts at birth but when a person becomes a Christian, Holy Spirit begins to use those natural gifts. In doing so, Holy Spirit enlarges and refines those gifts and sanctifies them for God’s service. Of course we can always develop new gifts or receive other gifts from God. In addition, God gives supernatural gifts to his people. Again, I suspect we have been limited because of a historical understanding that these gifts were for an earlier age, not for us. Add to that the lack of experience of the miraculous and supernatural and our eisegesis “this is not for us” is read into the story and church and society miss out in the gifts of God.

Nowadays these five gifts (APEST pic) Paul talks about are known as the five-fold ministry gifts, or APEST gifts. There is an increase in thinking about these roles in Christian circles – and a recognition that, to a large extent, the Western church has, for the last two hundred years, emphasised the shepherd and teacher roles at the expense of the others. A read through of some of the parish profiles for vacant charges would confirm that. I have never seen one that says ‘Our new minister should be an evangelist’, or, ‘Our new minister should spend many hours in private prayer and meditation so that she is enabled to speak prophetically to us and our community’, or, ‘Our new minister must have apostolic gifts to lead us in new directions, to engage with people in our community we don’t reach and show us the bigger picture.’

Paul is quite clear in Ephesians that all of these gifts are to be used for building up the church – they are for the common good. It is so important therefore that we don’t do to people today what the church has done to Junia and completely minimise her role in the early church. Most translations which use Junia have the two of them as well known to, or well respected by the apostles. I think that from church history and the rest of scripture the NIV has it right now – Junia, and Andronicus, were outstanding apostles, building the church in new places and new ways, sharing the gospel with people to the point of imprisonment so that even Paul acknowledges their contribution. What a team they must have been.

As I look round this morning I see people who have been told even indirectly that their talent is not worth much and their role has been limited. Where ministers or elders have done that to you, or if I have made you feel that way, I am sorry. Everyone has gifts from God and they need to be nurtured and honoured. I also see people with these gifts: many of you display incredible pastoral care as shepherds; there are those who teach. The other gifts are

present in this congregation and we need to recognise that in ourselves and others, and support and encourage their use – because we all benefit when God’s people use God’s gifts.