

## Women and Ministry

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Since our subject is women, we have a video clip here that actually deals with Jesus and his mother:

*...Two days later there was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine had given out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They are out of wine." "Madam, what do you have to do with this? My time has not yet come." "Do whatever he tells you." The Jews have rules about ritual washing, and for this purpose six stone water jars were there, each one large enough to hold between 20 and 30 gallons. "Fill these jars with water." They filled them to the brim. "Now draw some water out and take it to the man in charge of the feast." They took him the water, which now had turned into wine, and he tasted it. He did not know where this wine had come from, but of course the servants who had drawn up the water knew. So he called the bridegroom, "Everyone else serves the best wine first, and after the guests have drunk a lot, he serves the ordinary wine. But you have kept the best wine until now." Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee. There he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. After this, Jesus and his mother, brothers and disciples went to Capernaum and stayed there for a few days. (John 2:1-12)*

When we deal with the issue of women in ministry, sometimes the discussion starts and frequently ends with Paul. There's quite a lot in Paul that is of relevance to this discussion, but the discussion shouldn't begin there, and it certainly shouldn't end there. If we were to look at the New Testament in chronological order, the earliest portion of the New Testament is made up of Paul's letters, so it's understandable that a lot of attention has been paid to Paul. What I want to do first is talk to you about Jesus and the Gospels, and then we'll talk about Paul and his co-workers.

You need to understand the setting, first of all. Prior to Jesus there were no women disciples of any Jewish teachers or Rabbis. Let me say that again: there were no women disciples of any Jewish teacher in Jesus' age prior to Jesus, and there are a variety of reasons for this. If you read the Talmud and the Mishnah, the codification of traditions in early Judaism, one of the things that the Rabbis said was that a woman is too flighty of mind to be able to absorb the profound teaching of our sages, therefore there is no point in allowing them to be disciples. Another said that to teach a woman Torah is to teach her lechery. That is, she's bound to twist it for some infernal or nefarious purpose. That's the kind of general attitude that we're dealing with. In addition to all of that, women were not allowed to be official witnesses to a whole host of acts in early Judaism, partly because they were not educated, and of course they were not educated by intention. It was also because of the issue of ritual uncleanness. According to Torah, women were periodically unclean at least once a month due to their menstrual flow, and since they were unclean they were to absent themselves from the synagogue, from public assembly, and from a variety of things. The Rabbis' conclusion was that this meant they were not capable of being a president of the synagogue or reading the Torah on a given Sabbath, because you never would know which Sabbath they would have to

absent themselves from some services because of ritual impurity. So there were a variety of reasons why women could play only limited religious roles in Jewish society. Even so, God overcame some of those.

We have figures like Deborah and Miriam, who were prophets and judges in the Old Testament. We have figures like Queen Esther and others who provided precedent for women to assume certain kinds of leadership roles, even religious leadership roles, amongst the people of God. But you need to understand what a sea change had happened to the people of God after the Maccabean era. During the age of the Maccabees over a century and a half before Jesus, the Jews had finally retaken the Promised Land. They had finally recaptured it; it was finally theirs. Once again, as it had been in the time of David and of Solomon, the whole land belonged to them after the Maccabean wars against the Hasmonean rulers. For a very short period of time, just over 100 years, the land was theirs, but in the first century BC, they lost it again. It was taken ultimately by an Idumean named Herod the Great - Idumean was the early Jewish form of Edomite. How well did the Israelites and the Edomites get along? Not too well. So how well pleased would they be to have an Idumean king ruling over them? They would not be best pleased at all. And so it was that Herod the not-so-great became king of Judea, and after him his three sons. They ruled Judea, they ruled Galilee, they ruled Samaria, Iturea, Trachonitis; they ruled basically the whole area on both sides of the Jordan associated with or close to the Holy Land. And Israel once again became a land ruled by those who were not their own. In fact, Archelaus, the son to whom Judea was given after Herod the Great died, was singularly inept in ruling Judea, so it was necessary to do something about this situation. He called for help, help came in the form of Rome, and before you knew it, Judea became a Roman province. Even the rulers in the north in Galilee, like Herod Antipas, who ruled during the time of Jesus, were client kings of Rome.

How is that of relevance to the discussion of women in ministry? It's of relevance in this regard. Jews felt profoundly that there was something rotten in Jerusalem, something wrong in the Holy Land, and they figured that the best way possible to repent of their sins and perhaps be given back the blessing of having the Holy Land was to get back to that old-time religion, to do a better job of following the patriarchal religion. Indeed, it was the agenda of the Pharisees that the whole Levitical code that previously applied only to priests and Levites must be applied to all Jews. When you do that and that is your program, you're going to be exceedingly concerned about clean and unclean, about Sabbath observance, about going to the festivals, about wearing the *tzit tzit*, about wearing the prayer shawls, about all that sort of thing. Jesus came along at a time when the patriarchal religion was being repristinised by the Pharisees, and Jesus did not exactly follow their lead.

Luke 8:1-3 is one of the most remarkable texts in all of the Gospels. I will read it for you,

"Soon afterwards Jesus went on through cities and villages in Galilee, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the dominion of God. The twelve were with him, as were some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, such as Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna of Chuza, Herod's estate agent, and Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources."

When I told you that there were no women disciples of Jewish Rabbis before Jesus, I was being very serious about that. Not only were there no disciples, there were no travelling disciples of any Rabbi, because the whole gestalt of early Judaism was if you were a great sage, people would come to you, you would not go and seek out them. You certainly wouldn't be itinerant; you would be located in a specific place where you would set up a school, and people would come and attend and study at the feet of the great Rabbi. This was not Jesus' praxis. Indeed, Jesus was different in many regards, not the least of which is that he travelled with women he was not related to. You can see the headline in the Galilean Gazette: "Radical Rabbi Travels with Unrelated Women!" The truth of the matter is that right from the beginning Jesus had both male disciples and female disciples, even during the period of his Galilean ministry. When one was a disciple, one could travel with the other disciples, go to various places, be sent on missions, and support the work of the disciples. These three women are going to be especially important in the gospel-telling, because they're going to show up and be amongst those who are last at the cross, first at the tomb, and first to see the risen Jesus. The very story of Jesus affirms women's presence and right to be disciples, women's roles going beyond the traditional roles they would have in a family, indeed, even their right to be patronesses of the twelve and of Jesus, which is what Luke 8:1-3 is all about – they were travelling providers of funds and resources for the other disciples.

Listen to the names of these three women again: Miriam, her real name – we call her Mary Magdalene – Miriam from Migdal, a little fishing village on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee, out of whom Jesus cast seven demons. Now seven in a Jewish way of thinking is a complete set – you've got the lot if you've got seven. So this is as possessed a person as one could possibly be, and thereafter as healed a person as one could possibly be, because Jesus had changed her life. The most peculiar of the three is Joanna of Chuza, Herod's estate agent; that is, he was the vine and vineyard keeper of Herod Antipas' vineyards in Galilee. He helped run his estate. Now how do you think he felt when he discovered one day that his wife had gone walkabout? His wife had left to travel around with this radical prophet sage named Jesus all over Galilee. Joanna was a high status person, the wife of an important person – Herod's estate agent – and yet here she was traipsing around Galilee, following Jesus and travelling with the twelve. And then we have Susanna, about which we know least of all, except that she was also there in Jerusalem, come D-Day – Jesus' death day when he was buried and when he rose again.

We have a story that includes women from the outset. We could go to the birth narratives and look at the roles that Mary and Joseph play – you will discover that Mary was far more spiritually perceptive than Joseph, and Elizabeth was far more spiritually perceptive than Zechariah, who was a priest who was struck dumb for awhile because he was not with the program as to what God wanted. Indeed, we hear the story of Anna and Simeon. Simeon's just blest to see the Messiah and pass away – he represents the old patriarchal regime. But Anna is fired up as a prophetess when she sees the Messiah, because she knows it means the liberation of people like her and that women would be allowed to be fully included in all the activities of the people of God. So she goes forth and proclaims the good news that the Messiah has come. There are all these kinds of stories in Luke's gospel that create an ethos of expectation in regards to both men and their roles and women and their roles, and the one thing for sure is that Jesus was not simply repeating the patterns of the past. He was not into baptising the customs of the culture and calling them

good, something the church has done in many ages. No, Jesus was all about new wine, which frankly could no longer be put in old wineskins, which is one of the reasons I showed you this story.

But there's another reason as well. If you look at the relationship of Jesus and his mother - that story comes up twice in the Gospel of John, in John 2 and 19 - and in both stories, Jesus does not call her mother. He does not call her "Mom," and, no, he doesn't even call her "Mum"! He calls her "Woman"; that is, he uses a distanced device when he relates to her. Now if you read between the lines of the story in John 2, you see already that Mary knows very well that he's capable of remarkable things. She comes to Jesus and says, "They have no wine," hint, hint, nudge, nudge, wink, wink - implied, "Do something." Jesus rebuffs her! He says, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me?" This is clearly not Jesus' own wedding, not even a wedding he feels responsible for providing for, but she's relentless, as Moms tend to be. She comes to the steward and says, "He'll come around. Do whatever he tells you." And so he does, and he provides gallons of Gallo for the whole party. What's interesting is that Jesus disengages from the authority of his mother on this occasion, but when you get to John 19, he re-engages with her and integrates his mother into the family of faith by turning her over to the paradigmatic disciple, the beloved disciple. So we have separation in John 2 and closure in John 19, and Jesus' mother is incorporated into the community of faith at the cross. There's more here to this story than just a re-Christianising of patriarchal religion. There were new roles, new opportunities, new identities on offer for women in the gospels.

Consider for a minute the story of Mary and Martha. We hear of them in both Luke's gospel and John's gospel, the famous story in Luke 10:38-42, where Martha is busy being the hostess with the most-ess. She's back in the kitchen cooking the matzah soup, and the falafel, and the hummus, and meanwhile, her sister Mary, the lazy layabout, is sitting at the feet of Jesus, soaking up his teaching. Notice what happens here, if you will: "But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to Jesus and said, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the kitchen work by myself? Tell her to help me.'" Seems like women were regularly trying to manipulate Jesus. "Jesus answered her, 'Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha, Martha. You are worried and distracted about many things, but only one dish is really necessary, and Mary has chosen the good portion.'" What's he doing here? He's affirming that however good women's traditional roles may be, that priority one even for women is to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from him. Now he's not discouraging women from doing wonderful things in the kitchen, but what he is doing is making clear that the priority even for women is to be a disciple of Jesus, and Mary has chosen the better portion.

There are many of these kinds of stories in the gospels, and one of the things that I think is the most notable about the way Jesus deals with women is that almost without exception he is never critical of women. He's always affirming and encouraging of them taking on new roles, being his disciples, and doing new things. For us in the church, that's not a big deal. In every church I've ever been a part of, the majority of the members were women. No big surprise that women should be disciples. But it was a big thing in his context. It was a radical departure in his culture, and the trajectory and emphasis he was placing went against other Jewish movements like the Pharisaic movement, so Jesus was doing a new thing.

It's my view that if you read Mark 7 carefully, the bottom line about Jesus' teaching about clean and unclean is that those laws of ritual purity or impurity are obsolete, because the Kingdom is coming to town. The dominion of God, the eschatological saving reign of God, is breaking into human history, and new occasions teach new duties. I do believe that Mark 7:15 sums up something essential about Jesus' teaching, and one of those things was, "It is not that which enters you or touches you which defiles you, it's that which comes out of the human heart" - war, adultery, racism, sexism, you name it - go back and read Mark 7. If it is true that Jesus was suggesting that in the new covenant the laws of clean and unclean, and of ritual impurity no longer applied, who would benefit most from that? I'll tell you who - women, who then would be allowed to play all kinds of religious roles, no longer hindered or held back by their monthly period. Yes, I do think that Jesus came not merely to re-endorse or re-subscribe to old Jewish dictums but to offer good news to both women and men. He came so that the least, the last, and the lost might become the first, the most, and the found. And so he hung out with tax agents and notable sinners, and he treated those who were considered pariahs in their own society with compassion.

You remember the story of the woman caught in adultery - a powerful story. Now the thing I would want to ask about that story is if the woman was caught *en flagrante*, in the very act of adultery, where is the man that was caught in adultery? That was a double standard when it came to sexual ethics in the first century AD. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Jesus didn't like any kind of situation where one party is scape-goated and the other goes scott-free - not a good thing. Notice what he does in this situation. He holds the elders, the religious authorities in this situation, responsible for the moral climate of their community. He says to them who brought this woman to him, he says loud and clear, "Let the one who is without sin in this matter cast the first stone." He's not saying, "Let anyone who is without sin altogether and is perfect and pure cast the first stone." That's a common misunderstanding when, in fact, this is a specific Jewish dialogue about this specific situation and this specific woman who had committed adultery, which indeed was a serious sin and crime according to Old Testament law, subject to stoning. Jesus says, "Let whichever one of you is without moral responsibility in this matter go ahead and cast the first stone." And one by one they dropped their stones and slunk off into the night, leaving Jesus with this woman alone. "Woman, has anyone here condemned you?" He uses the very same word he used of his mother - he calls her "Woman." "Woman, has anyone here condemned you?" "No, sir," she says. "Neither do I condemn you," he says, "but go and sin no more." You see that balance of justice and mercy there, of righteousness and compassion? Jesus knew who were normally the victims in a male-dominated, androcentric society. We should know who they are as well. It is still true today that in over 95% of the cases of rape, at least in North America, women are the victims. It is still true today that in over 90% of the cases of child molestation, men are the perpetrators. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Jesus came to make all things new, and new occasions require a whole new moral approach to the roles of women and men.

Now just how androcentric the world was that Jesus lived in is shown by the fact that people were distinguished from other people by the names of their father - the name of the mother didn't matter. Simon was Simon bar Jonah - what really mattered was who was his daddy. Look at the genealogy in Matthew 1;

it's a male-dominated culture, or as that great American philosopher, James Brown, once said, "It's a man's, man's, man's, man's world."

What was Jesus to do about this? He enlisted women as his disciples, said the Kingdom is coming, and said there's going to be a place at the table for unexpected guests, including you. He was about changing the cultural agendas along the way, and if he hadn't been about that, it would be surprising that his followers would have been so adamant about this after Easter, because it was directly against the flow of the culture. It was Jesus who provided the impetus for this transformation to take place, and God in his own miraculous way of dealing with us made sure that women would be important by making them the key witness at the birth, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus – the heart of the Christian creed. We had to rely on the witness of women – no choice! They were the first eyewitnesses of these events. That required that we totally re-evaluate the way that we look at women's witness. In Luke 24, when the women go to tell the male disciples, huddling in fear in the Upper Room, that the tomb is empty and Jesus has risen, Luke 24 records that the reaction of the male disciples was, "And they thought it was an old wives' tale." The witness of women wasn't considered worth a penny, and yet early Christianity said their witness counts in all four gospels. They were the ones who did not deny, desert, and betray Jesus. They were last at the cross and first at the tomb, and in the person of Mary Magdalene, the very first to see the risen Jesus.

You will discover that Jesus commissions Mary Magdalene to go proclaim the Easter message to the male disciples, to "his brothers," he calls them. And the story in Greek carries on by saying, "and she went *angellousa*, proclaiming on the way." For me, "If it's good enough for Jesus, if it's good enough for Jesus, if it's good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me." If he can commission them to go proclaim the Easter message, who are we to prevent that? Ah, you may be saying, "okay, there's all this gospel stuff, and yes, women can be disciples, we know that. But they're not supposed to be head pastors and teachers and missionaries and evangelists and these things. After all, the Apostle Paul banned that, didn't he?" No, as a matter of fact, he did not. So let's talk about Paul and his co-workers.

We're going to start with a very important passage, often overlooked and neglected – Romans 16. Hear now the word: "I introduced to you Phoebe, our sister, being the deaconess of the church, which is in Cenchreae" Actually, it says "deacon," just in case you're wondering. "...in order that you might welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints." What does that imply about Phoebe? She's not only a deacon, but she's amongst the saints. "And that you might stand by her in whatever manner she may need assistance with, also because she herself has been a patroness of many, including me myself." Now we're told all kinds of things here about Phoebe. Paul is writing to the Roman Gentiles saying, "you need to receive her!" It is likely that she's actually carrying Paul's letter to the Romans with her – one of the reasons she's commended here. Indeed, it is likely that Paul was relying on her, as he had on Timothy and Titus on occasions, not merely to deliver the letter in the sense of handing it over, but to open it up and deliver it orally to the congregations there in Rome when she arrived. She is Paul's agent on the ground, preparing the way for Paul's arrival in Rome. He intends to come to Rome, as we've studied the last two days, he intends to use it as a launching pad for further missionary work in Spain, and who does he send to prepare the way, who is his John the Baptist? Phoebe, who comes to Rome to prepare the way for Paul the great Apostle to the Gentiles to arrive. She is a Deacon, she is a patroness, she's notable amongst the saints, she

is to be welcomed, she is to be received, and notice what he says here, "And then whatever sort of assistance she needs, you give it to her." Now this is not an idle comment, because the kind of assistance Paul is talking about is assistance in ministry. He doesn't just mean put her up in a nice hotel; she didn't need that, did she? She's a woman of wealth, she was Paul's patron, and she had been the patron of many others. This is not talking about bringing out the hospitality wagon. What kind of assistance did she need? Assistance in ministry. Paul says, "you give it to her!" But that's far from all. I think, to sum up about Phoebe, we can say these two things: He wishes her to be received in Rome so she can minister there, and two – more importantly – she is delivering Paul's letter to the Romans, orally and rhetorically, an effective way, as was the custom for Paul's carriers of his letters. Now this is an important point, because, you see, if you have one of your co-workers who's with you when you write a letter, they can do what? They can ask questions, they can get explanations, they can have amplifications from the source, so that when they read out or rhetorically perform this document as an oral discourse, they will be able to say, "and by that Paul meant... and not by that Paul meant." So they bring with them the store of knowledge they had, which they learned while they were with Paul when he was writing this document and could amplify on it. They don't really hand over the document and say, "Do the best you can – make of it what you will." No, it's to be delivered by his co-workers – in this case, Phoebe.

What does it mean to say she was a deacon, a *diakonos*, or as we might call her, a deaconess. What does it mean to say that she was that? This term, *diakonia*, means literally to offer practical help. In some cases it has an even more technical meaning which refers to waiting on tables, so it does have to do with various practical ministries of providing food, providing clothing, those kinds of things. That's the normal meaning of deacon in the New Testament; how very different from some modern meanings of deacon. In this particular case, when Paul says that she was his patron or benefactor, this may mean that she hosted Paul, but it may also mean that she provided the funds so that he could travel to Jerusalem and Rome. She sent him on his way, which was part of such a thing. Whatever else we make of those things, Phoebe is the advance guard of Paul going to Rome. He didn't send Timothy, he didn't send Titus, he didn't send Silas. When he wanted to go to the heart of the Empire, the most important city in the Empire, the person he sent with the letter to the Romans was Phoebe. This cannot be an accident.

Here's another portion of Romans 16; it reads as follows: "Greet with every show of affection Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who for the sake of my life risked their own neck, for whom not I alone give thanks but also all the churches of the Gentiles, and greet them warmly in the assembly in their house." Now we know about Priscilla and Aquila from a variety of texts: 1 Corinthians 16, this text in Romans 16, Acts 18 – we could go on. One of the things that is interesting is that with only one exception, everywhere this ministry couple is mentioned – and they are a ministry couple – guess which one is mentioned first? It's always Priscilla. This stands out from the usual practice of the era in a large way. You don't mention the wife before the husband; this is not done. What does this mean? It suggests that if either one of these two were more prominent as minister or co-workers of Paul, it was Priscilla rather than Aquila. In Acts 18, we are told that this ministry couple "instructed Apollos more accurately in the way of the Lord." If you need a precedent for women teaching men, there you have it – read Acts 18 again. It's

perfectly clear. Not only did they instruct men, they instruct some of the early Christian leaders like Apollos, one of the great apostles of the first century AD – no problems with women instructing men.

In this particular case, however, they have gone back to Rome. They're already there, and they, like Phoebe, are part of the advance guard for Paul in Rome. He calls them his co-workers in Christ Jesus; he says they even risked their own lives for him. But notice what else he says, "It's not just I who give thanks for them," but who else? "All," underline "all," and all means – wait for it – all! "All the churches of the Gentiles" – all of the churches in Asia, all of the churches in Galatia, all of the churches in and around Antioch and elsewhere in Syria and Damascus, all the churches on Cyprus, on Crete, in Greece, and in Rome. These folks got around! If you read the New Testament carefully, we know that they had homes in Rome, Ephesus, and Corinth – at least those three places. They were more peripatetic than John Wesley – they got around, a ministry couple, important, and Paul's co-workers. He's proud to own them; he wishes the audience to do the same.

That means – hear me now – that their ministry was not confined to a particular local congregation. It wasn't a matter of them being ordained by one local church and then they have authority in that one local church – no, no! They had authority throughout all of the churches of the Gentiles, and they did ministry in many of the churches of the Gentiles. We are told in Romans 16, in addition to all that, that they are already housing a house church in Rome.

Notice that in Romans 16, Paul exhorts some group to greet them affectionately. In fact, the Greek says, "wrap your arms around them and give them every show of affection" – not like the JB Phillips translation that says, "greet them with a hearty handshake." No, "greet them with every show of affection." Paul is actually exhorting the Gentile Christians in Rome to embrace the Jewish Christians in Rome, the chief of which he mentions are people like Priscilla and Aquila. It's Jewish Christians who meet in their home. The Jewish Christian house churches are in some way estranged from or divided from the Gentile house churches, so Paul exhorts the Gentiles as the apostle to the Gentiles, to embrace all of these Jewish Christian minorities, wrap their arms around them, and receive them warmly.

What's striking to me about this passage as we go through it is that the ones Paul mentions that are his co-workers are all Jews, which is to say in the most conservative of all those cultures in the Mediterranean crescent, we have all of these different kinds of examples of women in ministry. It would be easier for them to do that in Rome than in beautiful downtown Judea, easier in Asia Minor, and yet all of these women that he mentions by name are Jewish women. If God can even change that situation, he could change any situation in the first-century Greco-Roman world. But there's so much more to tell you. Let's move on...

Listen to this series of greetings: "Greet with every show of affection my beloved Epaenetus, who is the first-fruit of Asia in Christ. Greet with every show of affection Maria, who has laboured much for you." Who had she worked for? Christians! "Greet with every show of affection Andronicus and Junia, who are my relations and fellow prisoners, and who are notable amongst the apostles and who were in Christ before me," and that's a mouthful. We're going to analyse this one to the nth degree. This part right here is crucial, because he's talking about both male and female apostles. In the Greek, when you're dealing with the accusative case of a noun, the form of the accusative case can sometimes be read as either male or



female. So some scholars have said, okay, this is Andronicus and Junias – two men – because Paul surely couldn't mean that women were apostles. That's impossible. He couldn't have possibly meant that. Let me tell you what's wrong with that argument. There are no examples in any of the Greco-Roman papyri, or in any literary source for the name Junias – male name. But there are literally thousands of examples of the occurrence of the name Junia – female name. And we should have already learned something from the fact that Paul greets ministry couples: Priscilla and Aquila. In fact, he greets three or four ministry couples in this chapter; another one is Andronicus and Junia. So I think there is really no case to be made that Junia is really a man. No, Junia is a woman, and she's probably the wife of Andronicus.

But there's so much more. He says, "They are my kinsmen, my relations." This means, at the very least, that they are Jews – it includes that. It may mean they are his cousins, but notice what else he says. He says, "They were in Christ before me;" that is, they were converted before Paul. Now where could this have happened? Was there any Gentile mission before 34 AD when Paul was converted on the road to Damascus? Survey says, no, there wasn't. Even Peter and Cornelius happened quite by accident and happened after Paul on the road to Damascus. But these folks were converted before then. Where could this have happened? In Jerusalem, or in Galilee. Stick with that thought for a moment, and now I'm going to tell you that the Latin form of the name Joanna is Junia. Are you with me now? It is the argument of Richard Bauckham [*Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (2002)], a very important New Testament scholar from St Andrews in Scotland, that Joanna actually is Junia, that she had been a follower of Jesus even in Galilee, and that if we read Luke 8:3 more carefully you will see that it just says, "Joanna of Chuza," it doesn't say, "Joanna the wife of Chuza." If it says "Joanna of Chuza," that could mean the daughter of Chuza, it could mean the sister of Chuza; it doesn't have to mean the wife of Chuza. And so he argues that this Junia is in fact Joanna, who had not only travelled with Jesus in Galilee but had seen the risen Lord. Now for Paul the chief criteria for being an apostle is have they seen the risen Lord and been commissioned by him. Does he say these two have? Oh yes! He even says a lot of things – he says they were his, what? – "fellow prisoners." You don't get yourself incarcerated if you've done nothing offensive. What could they have been incarcerated for? Some kind of Christian work, some kind of sharing of the gospel.

You see, here's the problem by the time we get to the middle of the first century AD. But the time it became clear that Christianity was not simply a part of Judaism, not merely another wing of Judaism, what happened was that Christianity then was branded as a *superstitio*, from which we get the word "superstition." It means an illegitimate religion, a religion that you could get prosecuted for if you practiced it, a religion for which you could be thrown in jail or set in chains. Unlike Judaism, which was protected as an authorized religion in the Roman Empire, an offshoot of Judaism like the Jesus movement was not protected, and the less and less it appeared to be a Jewish thing, the more and more dangerous it was and likely it would be branded as a separate religious entity. Hence, Christians increasingly were imprisoned, tried, even executed, and the further we go into the first century AD, the more it becomes clear that this was a separate thing from non-Christian Judaism. "They were my fellow prisoners."

Now the most important phrase is this one: "...who are notable amongst the apostles." "Apostles" is a set group here. Some have tried to translate this, "were noteworthy to the apostles." Now what happens if you

do that? Andronicus and Junia cease to be apostles; they're noteworthy, but they're no longer apostles. But, in fact, the Greek does not suggest this. This is the literal translation here: "notable among the apostles," which is the most natural rendering of this phrase. I think we have here an example of both women and men apostles who served alongside Paul in various ways. Romans 16 is rich in such descriptions.

I want us to consider, if we can, some other Pauline texts that are important along this way. Look at this one just for a second: "Greet with every show of affection Herodion, my relative. Greet with every show of affection from the house of Narcissus those who are in the Lord. Greet with every show of affection Tryphaena and Tryphosa..." These are female names. Notice what they're called, "the labourers in the Lord." "Greet with every show of affection Persis, the beloved who's laboured much in the Lord. Greet with every show of affection Rufus, the chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." Some woman has been Paul's spiritual mother and is also the mother of Rufus, who seems to have been the son of Simon of Cyrene, if you look at Mark 15.

We need to look at some other texts; indeed, we need to look at the so-called problem texts, and in order to do that we're going to back up and start with 1 Corinthians 11. In 1 Corinthians 11 we have a lengthy argument, the gist of which is that Paul wishes to give permission to women to pray and prophecy so long as they will wear the appropriate head covering. That's the long and short of the argument, but the argument moves on at length. Here it is:

"I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you, but I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. Any man who prays or prophecies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophecies with her head unveiled disgraces her head. It is one and the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman will not cover her head, then she should cut off her hair. But if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or be shaved, she should wear a head covering."

Not a veil, by the way - we're not talking about something covering the face, we're talking about something covering the hair, if you will. "For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and reflection of God, but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman was made from man." Thus far an argument from creation, but listen to how he turns it around:

"Nevertheless," he says, "neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless," verse 11, "in the Lord woman is not independent of man and man is not independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman, but all things come from God. Judge for yourself. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it degrades him? But if woman has long hair, it is her glory, for her hair

is given to her for a head covering. For if anyone is disposed to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God."

Now this argument, as convoluted as it is, and to us it may seem peculiar in various degrees, is an argument about the fact that Paul was going to allow women to pray and prophecy in the congregation. If he were to forbid this, all he had to say was that it's forbidden – women can't speak in the congregational meeting or in the worship service – and then we wouldn't need to have these 20+ verses of argument. "It's okay," says Paul, "but let them be sure to wear a head covering." Now, why does he say that? Well, there are two things going on here. First of all, he believes that the gender distinctions between maleness and femaleness are a good gift from God and should be reflected in worship. The creation order should be reflected in worship, so that's a good thing. But at the same time, he says, in essence, that no one's glory should be manifest in a worship service except whose? God's glory! And since woman is the crown of creation, the glory of humanity - if you read the Genesis story - and since her hair was said to be her glory, what must she do? Her hair must be covered so that only the glory of God is seen in the worship service. Now there's another reason as well, which we will get to when we get to 1 Timothy 2. Woman in this period wore what I would call bouffant or beehive hairdos, and in addition to that, they wore hairdos in which they interwove jewels and bright spangly objects, sometimes even money. Now I want you to imagine going to a house church meeting, which was invariably in the late afternoon or in the evening and required lamps. Imagine a woman coming in without her hair covered, into a room full of oil lamps. A woman walks in; it's a human disco ball walking into the room – light is reflected in all directions! This is not a good thing! So what does Paul say as a practical matter as a pastor: "Let her head be covered. The only glory that should be shown is not the glory of a woman's hair, but the glory of God. If she will do this, there's no problem with her praying and prophesying." It's an interesting argument, but it reminds us that he's not forbidding women to speak in the congregation.

Already in Chapter 11 he's talking about the congregation meeting. He's going to go on to talk about how they should serve the Lord's Supper in the latter half of 1 Corinthians 11, and then in 1 Corinthians 12-14 he's going to try hard to sort through the way the Corinthians misuse their gifts.

Here's a fact that I hope you will remember: when God gives you a gift, he gives it to you. You can either use it or abuse it or neglect it – those are your three options. Properly using it, misusing it, or neglecting it – all of those three things are possible. Even prophets are known to have misused their gifts. You remember the famous story of Elisha? Now Elisha was follicly-challenged. One day he was having one of those follicly-challenged kind of days, and children came up to him and said, "Go up old bald head, go up old bald head!" What does he do? He has the *ruach* or the Spirit of God in his life, and what does he do? He sends them off, impels them into the presence of wild animals, and he abuses the power God has given him with children. This should be a disturbing story to you, but it's a reminder that God gives you your gifts, and you can either use them or misuse them. And Paul's perfectly happy for women to use their gifts as long as they don't abuse them.

Which leads me to the next two texts, the favourite texts of the abolitionists: 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. Let's turn to them. 1 Corinthians 14: 33b-36:

“As in all the churches of the saints, women should keep silent in the church, for they are not permitted to speak. They should be subordinate as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their man at home. It’s shameful for a woman to speak in the assembly. Or did the word of God originate with you? Are you the only one it ever reached?”

Now, you should never read this passage without having first read the whole of 1 Corinthians 14, and it’s perfectly clear that like swatting flies at a picnic, Paul is one after another picking off the misuse of gifts and the problems that are going on in the Corinthian worship service. He says, “Are you going to speak in tongues? Fine, but there better be somebody there to interpret them.” He says, “If you’re going to prophecy and somebody else is already prophesying, just wait, you can hold it. You don’t have to blurt it out; let them finish first.” He’s correcting both men and women in the way they speak in worship.

Now here is some insight from the context that will help you with this. In a normal Greco-Roman setting like Corinth, they had a very specific image of prophecy. Prophecy is when you went up the mountain to the oracle at Delphi and asked her questions. Should I get married, yes or no? Should I go to war, yes or no? Should I obtain this land, yes or no? There was a period of time where it was appropriate to ask questions of a prophet or a prophetess. What does Paul say that these women must do? He says that if they have any questions, let them ask at home. You see, they’re just assuming that it’s no different than going to the oracle at Delphi. We’ve got prophets in our midst, great! I don’t have to climb that huge mountain all the way to Delphi – we’ve got a prophet right here in town; in fact, right here in our own worship service. I’ve got a lot of questions for you, prophet! It was pandemonium in the worship service. Paul is trying to prevent pandemonium, so he says there are to be no questions during the sharing of the prophets’ words. Now Paul also says that the utterances of the prophets must be sifted – they must be weighed. A prophetic oracle could be 80% inspiration and 20% perspiration. It could be 80% from God and 20% from just the prophet himself. You need to weigh it, and you need to sift it. You need to critically think through it, but what you’d better not do is start asking a bunch of questions, because that totally disrupts the worship service. How would it be in your congregation if your minister’s preaching away, gets halfway through the sermon, and then somebody raises their hand and says, “I’ve only got five questions, can we stop for that now?” That would not work so well! And Paul wanted the prophets to have the opportunity to share without the Spanish Inquisition. So he is correcting an abuse of speech here.

Now I want you to notice several other things. First of all, in this text he commands silence when a prophet is speaking: silence, *sigāō*, ‘be silent.’ Not quietness, *hēsuchia*, that comes in 1 Timothy 2, but here it’s silence. He’s already said that there is to be silence in all the churches in regard to earlier speech acts in this chapter; this verb comes up before. Now he’s applying it to a specific group of women – wives – and telling them to ask at home. But that’s not all; he says they are to be subordinate as the law says. Now I ask you a question, where in the Old Testament Law, where in the Pentateuch does it say that women should be submissive to men? Guess what – nowhere! There are no texts that say women should submit to men in the Pentateuch, but there are texts that say, “when the word of God is spoken, let all the earth keep silence and submit.” This is not about submission to men, it’s about submission to the oracles of God and to the hearing of the word – a very different matter. “Let them be in submission as even the Law says” – yes

the Law does say – “let all the earth keep silence. The Lord is in his holy temple and is speaking.” And questions are not appropriate on those occasions.

Then there’s this other text: 1 Timothy 2, the real *bete noir*, for those who want to ban women from ministry – here’s the text; we’re going to start with chapter 2:8 and following: “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument.” Do you notice that he’s already correcting the men to stop grumbling and just get up there and pray? Stop going wuzza, wuzza, wuzza and just get on with what God’s asking you to do. Stop standing up in the congregation and saying, “Here I am Lord, take my sister!” No, just stand up and pray. Sometimes that can be disconcerting.

On one occasion at Thanksgiving at the very last minute, my aunt asked my father to pray the Thanksgiving blessing over the meal that she’d been preparing for three or four or many days. They’d killed the fatted turkey, they had cranberry sauce, and all of the vegetables, and the pumpkin soup, and the pumpkin pie – the whole nine yards. My father was flustered and unprepared, and he got up and said, “Dear Lord, please pardon this food and bless our sins, in Jesus’ name. Amen.” He really did! And it was one of those times where he hadn’t realized what he said right at the moment, and my aunt said, “Pardon the food!” He was so embarrassed that every Thanksgiving after that it was tough not to be reminded of this – it was hard!

“Let men lift up holy hands without grumbling, ” say Paul. Also, “Let women dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided with gold, pearls, or with other expensive items.” Did you hear that? “...not with their hair braided” so that we produce a disco ball effect in the congregation. “Rather, they should be adorned with good works as is proper for women who profess reverence for God.” Then we come to the real rubber-meets-the-road kind of words, “Let a woman learn in quietness, with full submission.” Now again, this is a typical early Jewish commandment. When somebody’s teaching, you’re supposed to do what? Be quiet and listen and submit to the teaching. This is not about submitting to men, it’s about submitting to the teaching. “Let a woman learn in quietness with full submission. I am not now permitting any woman to teach or usurp authority over a man. She is to keep quiet.” There are several things about that verse, which is the crucial one. First of all, the verb is in the present continual tense. “I am not now permitting...” Does that mean I would never permit it? No, it means that in this specific situation, these women had not been instructed themselves – they needed to be instructed – and unless you’ve first been instructed, you shouldn’t be an instructor. Are you with me now? He’s correcting an abuse. There were women in this situation who apparently were just seizing the moment and having a go. They were not trained, and they were not prepared, and Paul is saying, “No, we’re not going to do that.” “I’m not now permitting women to do such teaching...” And then we have this word *authenteō*. It can be translated “to exercise authority over,” or it can be translated “to usurp authority over.” I have studied all 145 occurrences of this verb in Greek literature. It only occurs one time in the New Testament – *authenteō* is the verb. You know what I’ve discovered? In every text where some kind of correcting of a problem is going on, it always means “usurp authority over,” and in every text where it’s offering some positive thing that you ought to do, it means, “exercise authority over.” In this text, is Paul correcting abuses and problems? Yes, he is, and therefore the proper translation is, “usurp.” You should not usurp authority over the authorized and legitimate teachers,” says Paul. There’s an old Latin dictum that applies here: *abusus non tollit usum*. The abuse of a privilege does not rule out its proper use. In this same letter, 1 Timothy,

Paul goes on to say, "you older women who are trained, train some of the younger women. Teach them." He uses the same verb for teaching. So the issue is not women teaching, it's untrained women interrupting worship services, whether with questions or with teaching points or with power points or with video clips, or whatever it may be. And he says, "Stop it!" "Let all the earth keep silence, let us submit to the teaching of those who are authorized to teach." In this case there were women who were not authorized who are being forbad to teach until they first learn. That's the whole point. But there's more.

Even more interesting are verses 13, 14, and 15: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be either saved or kept safe through childbearing, provided, of course, she continues in faith and love and holiness with modesty." How very interesting – he goes back to the story of Adam and Eve. A question about the story of Adam and Eve: to whom was the commandment given, "Thou shalt not eat of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil"? To whom was this commandment given? Only to Adam; Eve wasn't around yet. Who had the responsibility to instruct her in regard to this commandment and its limitations? Adam had that responsibility. So when Eve goes to the tree and says, "Well, we're not even supposed to touch it," where do you reckon she got that from? The elaborations of her husband, who had not properly instructed her about the dangers therein, and this is why it is said universally through the scriptures, "she was deceived." A person who has been deceived is a person who wasn't properly trained or instructed in the first place and so was capable of deception. But then we have this wonderful reversal – so much for Adam and Eve. Why does he bring up the example of Eve? Because the women that he's addressing here have not been properly what? Instructed! Hello! So the example of Eve is very good. You know what happens when you go off half-cocked? You come home half shot – that's what happens! You need to be properly instructed first! It's not really a male/female issue; it's a non-initiated/fully-initiated kind of issue.

He then goes on to say that there's been a reversal of the Adam and Eve thing. He says, "But a woman shall be saved through the childbearing" – there's a definitive article before the word "childbearing" here in the Greek. Again, let me read it to you, "A woman shall be saved through the childbearing." Which childbearing do you think he has in mind? Surely it's the birth of Jesus, and who bore him? Mary. So Paul is offering a paradigm of Mary being Eve in reverse, because what do we know about the story of Mary? When the angel came to her, she responded in silence and in submission and said, "Be it unto me as you have said" – a model of how to receive an oracle or revelation from God. The curse that came through Eve was reversed in Mary. "Twas much that we were made like God long before in the garden, but that God should be made like us much more in the incarnation." The incarnation reverses the curse.

Some scholars have taken verse 15 to mean, "But a woman will be kept safe through childbearing, if they remain faithful." In other words, it's a promise to Christian women in regard to the dangers of bearing children that if they will be faithful, they will be kept safe. And you could see how that might be seen as a reversal of the curse on women, because what was the curse according to Genesis 3? They will have labour pains and danger in labour. Okay, so maybe it means, "A woman shall be kept safe through the childbearing." That's possible too, but what for sure it doesn't mean is a woman shall be saved through making babies! Paul does not believe in sanctification by grace through baby-making. He believes in justification by grace through faith.

Let me say to you again, 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy are correcting men who are guilty of abuses, and yet we're not banning men from being ministers just because some abused their privileges, are we? No we're not! So why should we exalt these two texts as if they give us license to say, "well, this obviously means that no women on any occasion should ever be teachers or preachers or missionaries or anything else." Of course not! He's correcting abuses; proper uses of your gifts are just fine.

In Romans 16, we have seen women playing the role of the house church, patroness, deaconess, apostle – a whole series of roles. So it is not true that the apostle Paul suggests that the ministry should be like the Levitical priesthood, the providence of men only. No, he too believed that the Kingdom was breaking in, and what determined who could minister was who's been called, who's been gifted, who's been filled with the Holy Spirit, who's been sent. Every Christian has a call to ministry – every Christian. For with the calling to follow Jesus is a calling to take up your cross and be an example like him. With the call to being a disciple, God gifts and prepares you for whatever ministry you have been asked to do. And the appropriate response is not, "Here I am, take my husband." The appropriate response is, "Here I am, Lord, send me."

Thank you very much.

Stephen Spence: Thank you very much. We have opportunity for some questions and some discussion now.

Question: Thanks, Ben, that was great! I was going to ask where, when and how did all of that get lost? If it's so obvious, which it obviously is, what did the church do to lose all that?

Ben: It's a long story, but I'm going to make it short, because we don't have time to tell the whole of church history, but here's what happened. Basically the church lost most of its future eschatology in the second century AD – it sort of gave up on it, it settled down to a long winter's nap, and it started re-creating and re-embracing the general customs of the culture. Then there was a theological hermeneutic that came into play as well that went like this: We're going to read all of these New Testament institutions in light of Old Testament institutions. So Sunday becomes the Sabbath, and the Lord's Supper becomes a sacrifice, and ministers become priests – we could keep going down this road. Baptism is like circumcision, okay? When you start re-reading all the New Testament institutions in light of Old Testament institutions, and when you get to the juncture where you say, "and ministers are priests," then what happens – it can't be women. So by the time you get to the Middle Ages, the vision of ministry and sacrament and word and order is so overwhelmingly Old Testamental that the initial new surge of the New Covenant, which involved both women and men in ministry, and the loss of eschatology, which could have corrected that, is gone. You've now got an institution about which Augustine can say, "we are the City of God." Our institutions are not all that different from those of the culture or those of the Old Testament, and we've been fighting an uphill battle ever since to really hear what the New Testament says about these things and accept their radical implications.

In our own culture, one of the big inhibiting factors, of course, is the fragmentation of the family – both in the church and outside of the church. A lot of the emphasis on the physical family and the importance of that has led to a lot of confusion about the difference between what kind of roles people should play as men and women and what kind of roles they can play in the church. It's assumed that what is true of A must be

true of B. Now everybody knows, of course, that in the physical family there are some gender-specific roles. Only women can bear the children. I'm sure they would like for us to take equal shares – it was even a Rabbi back in the first century AD who said, "When the Kingdom comes, women will give birth every 30 minutes!" This is not my idea of the resurrection in the Kingdom – it's a very androcentric view of what the kingdom will be like. I think the problem is as I have described it, and the problem today is that we are so confused about male/female roles in the family that that confusion has spilled over into male/female roles in the church. In order to protect the physical family, we have let go of the radical gospel call in regard to the family of faith, and there are issues there. Other questions...

Question: I find all that so freeing and positive, I can't help but ask, can you please say something about Ephesians 5:22? I'd love to hear it.

Ben: Yes! Thank you for reminding me – I meant to do the household codes, but I didn't get there! This is comment about the physical family; it's not a comment about roles in the church. So whether you're dealing with Colossians 3 & 4 or Ephesians 5 & 6, these are comments about the physical family. Now what you need to know is that Paul operates at different levels of discourse. When he writes Colossians, he's writing to a group of Christians that he did not convert and he had never visited. Think about it this way. What you will say to somebody on the first occasion you met them is probably not all that you would like to say to them. You're going to have to do what as a pastor – you know, when you're going to a new church – you've got to do what? You've got to start with and where they are. Well where are they? Well the de facto situation is that there's a patriarchal household structure – that's true all over the ancient Greco-Roman world – so Paul's got to start putting the leaven of the gospel into an already existing marital situation. So how's he going to do that? He's going to start trying to Christianise the institution. He's going to start requiring of the head of the household – the husband, the father, the master – some responsibilities that he never had previously. This may surprise you, but in none of the Greco-Roman household tables, which there are plenty of, is the husband ever said to be required to love the wife or to be required to be kind to his children, or to be required to be respectful and kind to his slaves. So Paul is actually saying something fairly radical when he says things that we take for granted about those kinds of relationship. He's trying to balance the ledger. That's also true of 1 Corinthians 7, when he says, "the body of the wife belongs to the husband," but then he turns around and says, "the body of the husband belongs to the wife," thereby eliminating the double standard. That second part of what he says would have been a shock in beautiful downtown Corinth, because men believed it was perfectly okay for them to go visit the prostitutes anytime they wanted to, but women couldn't do that. They were protecting the virtue of the family name, thank you very much! So it's clear enough that Paul has to start where they are and move them in a more Christian direction.

If you move from comparing Colossians 3 & 4 about submission to what is said about submission in Ephesians 5, the heading for the passage in Ephesians 5 is Ephesians 5:21, "Everyone should submit to each other out of reverence for Christ," and then the Greek is perfectly clear. Ephesians 5:22 doesn't even have the word submission there; it simply says, "wives to husbands as to the Lord." There's no verb there, so whatever submission meant when it was mutual is still what it means in the next verse, when it's still mutual. Then he turns around and says, "husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave



himself up for her." If that's not submission, I don't know what it is! It's submission that he's talking about, mutual submission, not unilateral submission.

On the first occasion, the Colossians hear a slightly Christianised version of what they've already got in the family structure, because that's probably as much as they could swallow in one sitting. But the next time around he's going to slap them upside the head and say, "You know, while we're at it, if you're really going to be God-like and Christ-like, this should be a mutual submission thing, thank you very much." So you need to look at not only what he says but the trajectory of the argument, and the trajectory of the argument is towards a more egalitarian and fair way of treating both women and men in marriage, that's where the argument's going.

The place where that's more clear is if you compare Colossians 4, Ephesians 6, and the whole little tiny epistle of Philemon in regard to slavery. In Colossians 4 and Ephesians 6, he's trying to ameliorate the effects of slavery on slaves by suggesting to the masters that actually they are Christians and you better treat them better. But when he writes his personal friend, Philemon, in a sort of third order moral discourse, he's bold enough to say, "I'm sending him back to you; however, I want you to treat him no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a brother." In other words, he's saying, "emancipate him." So if you follow the trajectory of the argument from Colossians 4, Ephesians 6 and to Philemon, he's getting bolder and bolder in what he says to those people who lived in Colossae in regard to slavery. And why's that? Because the more you get to know people, the more you can actually share your heart about a subject that's controversial. And that's what he's doing in that particular case. So it's important not to sound-bite Paul on slavery or on women or on children. You need to read all of the texts that are relevant and ask where is this argument going? Other questions...

Question: So when do you publish your new Bible – when can I get it and where can I get it from, and what advice do you have to other publishers of the existing translations?

Ben: Well, it's not so much a matter of translation, it's a matter of interpretation. I don't really think in 1 Corinthians 14 or 1 Timothy 2 that the passages are mistranslated; it's just that they're taken out of context and misused is the real problem. I've written three books on women in the New Testament: there's *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, there's *Women in the Earliest Churches* that deals with all the sticky Pauline texts, and then there's the expurgated no Latin, no Greek, no German, no French, no Hebrew, no Aramaic version, which is called *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* for lay persons. Speaking of which, may I encourage you to use inclusive language in the church and stop calling women guys. "You guys" doesn't work when you're speaking to a group of women; they're not guys, they're women created in the image of God. One of the things we need to do is to make clear that all persons are equally of sacred worth, created in the image of God, all are capable of being in Christ, and all can be gifted and graced by God in Christ to serve him in some way. It's just a matter of respect for God's actual work amongst us. I hope you will do that. I do have plenty of translations in my commentaries. I do original translations for any book I've written a commentary on, and since I'm on a pilgrimage to write a commentary on every book of the New Testament, eventually I guess there will be a Ben translation.

Question: Thanks, Ben. I really appreciate your ministry – very clear! Can you comment on why you think Jesus chose twelve men.

Ben: You need to remember that they were sent to Israel, and in specific he chose twelve men to go to the twelve tribes of Israel. I think it's just the same principle - he's got to start with them where they are. Realistically I think he understood that for women to assume a whole series of roles in ministry, it's going to have to be after the death and resurrection. It's going to have to be after the church begins to branch out to all other kinds of people before that can really be an effective thing. The whole milieu and ethos of early Judaism was that we've got to hunker down, we've got to really strongly affirm this patriarchal religion. We've just got to get on to that, then we will have made God an offer he can't refuse; he will give us back the land, and we'll be in control of our own destiny, we'll be in control of our own temple, and all of these sorts of things. I think Jesus was wise enough to know that his ministry was not going to be long, and so what he has to do is set the train in motion, but he expects many of the important social developments to happen after his day. And that's why the ministry of the twelve was specifically to the twelve. He even says that at the eschaton they will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, so the ministry of the twelve was not in fact to the world. If you look at who ends up being missionaries to the world, it's basically not the twelve. There is Peter, but other than Peter you've got Paul and Paul's co-workers, and a host of other people, both women and men. I think that as Jesus says in his parables, it's important to plant the seed, but some of them are not going to grow for a while, some of them need watering for a long time, and some need the ground pruned considerably before they can grow. There were a lot of things he said and did, and we shouldn't be too hard on the disciples – sometimes I know they were struck by massive dumb-o-rays. Jesus says something and they're just sort of, "What? What?" And they don't get it! Well, why should they? They don't have the Holy Spirit yet, they grew up with a full life in early Judaism, and this is something new.

The truth of the matter is that there's a reason why in the gospel of John it says, "They didn't understand this at this occasion, but later the Holy Spirit woke them up!" Remember Peter and the story of Cornelius? He goes all the way through three years in the seminary of Jesus. He gets out there on his own, he's evangelising, and he's thinking he's doing God's work. Then somebody says, "Come to Cornelius' house," and he says, "No, this is an unclean issue – I can't go there." So he's hungry, he falls asleep in the middle of the day, and he dreams of little piggies in a blanket and other things that he wasn't supposed to eat. And God has to tell him in that visionary dream, "Look, didn't you get it the first time? What God has declared clean, don't call unclean anymore." From a Jewish law point of view, it was unclean. It was unclean to go into a Gentile's house, it was unclean to shake a Gentile's hand, it was unclean to eat a Gentile's food – it goes like that – but it took Peter a long time to get there. It's just like us. They were Christian under construction, and sometimes the light dawns slowly. They didn't get it overnight, and I think we need to be equally charitable with ourselves when it comes to really understanding the radical implications of the gospel.

Question: Just on the radical implications of the Gospel, are there any early evidences of a church which was organized along radical lines, say for instance in the nature of a church in a household of a rich patron but being led by a slave?

Ben: I think we do have some evidence of that. For one thing, we have the example of Lydia. She's a really interesting case. We're not sure if that's her proper name – it may mean 'The Lydian,' which means she came from the region of Lydia, which is in what we would call Turkey today. What's interesting about her is several-fold. First of all, she has a household, she has her own slaves, and she's a dealer in royal purple dye – Murex dye. Why is that so significant? Because the emperor had the corner on the market, he only allowed his own slaves to sell this throughout the empire, and he got all the commission and the GST. You can't make royal purple cloth without Mr. Royal Purple authorizing it. This is the big deal here. This is a person who probably comes from a slave background, which is why she would also be called The Lydian, because otherwise slaves only had nicknames. Slaves are property, so they didn't have to have a proper name – they're property, so they have nicknames like Bambi, that sort of thing – they literally did! They had nicknames, or they were called by the region from which they came. I think you're dealing in Lydia with a person who's an incredible success story. She's done well with the Murex purple dye, she's built a household for herself in a Roman colony city. Now here's the other thing: Philippi's a Roman colony city, a city that answers directly to Rome and to the emperor, so they would have the emperor's agents in this city, like this woman. I think she was a slave, but at the end of Philippians, Paul says, "You know, I've converted members of the household of Caesar." Now which ones could that be? It's obviously not Nero's wife – who could this be? It's got to be some of the servants who themselves are now hosting a house church right under the nose of Nero, and he greets them at the end of Philippians. So yes, you've got women, slaves, and minors running churches, yes you do.

Question: We just wonder if you could comment on our situation here. The assembly of the South Australian Baptists for some time now has agreed that we can ordain women to be pastors, but the reality is that we have some churches with associate women pastors, but we don't seem to be able to come to actually grasping the nettle of a solo woman pastor.

Ben: I can't speak for your situation, but in the States that happens sometimes because it is seen as a violation of the husband's headship over a wife. There again you're dealing with the confusion between the roles of the physical family and the roles in the family of faith. There's no doubt that the New Testament says that the husband is the head of the physical family – there's no doubt about that – but the question is, head of what? Sometimes it's been said that when the two become one, then the question becomes "which one?" But the model of headship in the New Testament is head servant, not the boss or the dictator. So even in the physical family, what headship means is taking the lead in serving and being the head servant. I think that clearer teachings on the distinctions between the roles that one plays in the physical family and the roles one plays in the family of faith are really crucial to creating an ethos in which it would be easier for women to be able, prompted by the Holy Spirit and gifted by God, to be allowed to do that, and everybody would be more comfortable with it. My own experience in the Methodist Church is that there have been Methodist churches in my own home conference who had never had a woman pastor before, and when they had one that was good, they readily accepted it because you shall know the tree by the fruit that it bears. I realize there's still a glass ceiling that needs to be broken for some women to go further up in the ranks, but they need encouragement to do so, and they need support when they do it. They need to be embraced by the Board of Deacons, they need to be embraced by those in the congregation prepared to embrace them,

and they need to be allowed to give space so that they don't have to be 200% better than the men would have been. You see, this is one of the real problems – women feel like they have to do a much better job than the men, because they are under much closer scrutiny, and that's one of the disincentives for them to do such a job. There are all those kinds of psychological factors involved.

Thank you very much!

Stephen: On behalf of Burleigh College and the South Australian Baptist family of churches, I would like to express our thanks to you for the wisdom, the depth of scholarship that you bring to this issue, and for the clarity with which you are able to present it. It's of great help to us all, so thank you very much for that.

Perhaps I could close in prayer: Lord, we thank you for the radicalness of the Gospel, for the way it turns the world upside down, and the way it turns our world upside down. We pray that we would be people of courage, prepared to follow you wherever you lead, and that we would be prepared to take a stand on the Gospel and not find ourselves fooled and confused by the cultures around us. Amen.