

# Does it matter?

Who was Junia? Or should the question be: Who was Junias? Does it matter?

## **Male or female**

Junia is a name. It is the female form of the name. When given to a boy it becomes Junias. Some claim the male form of the name is virtually unknown. For that reason they insist the person mentioned with Andronicus in Romans 16.7 is a woman and definitely not a man. They may be right. We cannot put it more strongly than may be.

Andronicus and Junia, it is suggested, may have been husband and wife. As Paul also calls them his 'kinsmen', it is thought they were his blood relatives. We cannot be sure. Paul may have used the term for another reason.

What we can be sure of is this: some use this reference to Junia to support their view that women should be made bishops. In fact some like James Dunn (one-time professor at Durham University) insist what Paul says about Junia (along with his way of understanding verses in *1 Corinthians 12 & 14* and *1 Timothy 2*) means "conservative Evangelicals cannot justifiably claim the authority of Paul for their unwillingness to recognize that God may today be calling women... to the episcopate" (*Church Times*, 18 January 2013).

## **Junia or Junias?**

We shall consider Paul's use of the word 'apostle' in a moment. In the meantime let us focus on Junia. The name could be either feminine or masculine. We cannot tell from the spelling alone. Do we have any clues? The answer is yes. It may be that only three other instances can be found in some 8,203 pieces of Greek

literature that emanate from some 2,889 authors. And it may be that two of those three indicate the person referred to was a woman. Plutarch (c50-c120AD) in his *Life of Marcus Brutus* states that Brutus' sister Junia was married to Cassius. And Chrysostom (315-403AD) in a sermon on Romans 16.7, referring to Junia, speaks of the "great devotion of this woman".

However Epiphanius (315-403AD) saw things differently. He was both an historian and Bishop of Salamis. His description of Junias is important, and possibly decisive. We discover from him that the "Junias Paul mentions became bishop of Apameia of Syria". The Greek words used unequivocally indicate Junias was a man.

His view is supported by Origen (*died 252AD*). In the earliest existing commentary on *Romans* we find the masculine form of the name used, albeit in Latin.

If Epiphanius and Origen are right - and there is no evidence to say they are not - then it means the Junia of Romans 16.7 is not a woman. It also means it is not possible to use Junia to argue for the appointment of women as bishops.

## **Apostles**

How are we to interpret Paul's reference to 'apostles' in Romans 16.7?

Paul uses the term in relation to Andronicus and Junia. It is possible to read him as saying they were *among* the apostles. However, when the word he uses (*episemos* - well-known) is followed by the dative case ('the apostles' are in the dative) the use of the word 'to' is permissible. There is strong extra-biblical evidence for this. Thus it could well be - even probable - that Paul uses the term he does to convey the idea that Andronicus and Junia were outstanding or notable in the eyes of the apostles. Such is both a justifiable and reasonable understanding of the

text. We therefore have another reason to see one argument for women bishops as flawed.

### ***Restricted or general***

Those who claim Junia was both a woman and an apostle, also assert Paul uses the word 'apostle' in a restricted and technical sense. They interpret to mean that, like Paul, Andronicus and Junia were also apostles. They reject the notion Paul uses the word in a more general way.

However it is sometimes used that way (see *Philippians 2.25 and 2 Corinthians 8.23*) to convey the idea that all believers are called to function as 'messengers' or 'representatives'. There is no compelling reason to say Paul definitely does not use the word in its general sense here. And there is no compelling reason to insist that its use here refers to the authoritative oversight role entrusted to Paul and the twelve apostles.

### ***Caution***

Taken individually and together these facts demonstrate the need for great caution.

It is not possible to establish there definitely were female apostles (in the technical sense) in apostolic times. Nor is it right or wise to build an argument for women bishops on such questionable evidence.

### ***Other letters***

Space does not allow us to look in detail at *1 Corinthians 12 & 14* and *1 Timothy 2*. Suffice it to say, in these passages, unlike Romans 16.7, the apostle carefully develops his arguments. Far from merely describing how men, women, children and servants are to behave in a household situation, as is sometimes asserted, he provides principles which apply in all circumstances. The principles he establishes are rooted in creation and history. They refer to God's design and purpose. They concern all

mankind, male and female. They relate to what we are and how we are to function as those created in and as the image of God. The sexes are equal. But they are not the same. They have different God-given responsibilities.

This message is also found in other parts of the Bible, most notably in *Genesis 1-3* and *Isaiah 3*. That being so we should be surprised when some fail to teach that church elders (pastors) are to be male and *not* female. Those who teach otherwise err. They both misunderstand and misapply the Scriptures.

### ***Our rule***

How does God rule his church? The Reformers of the sixteenth century asserted he does so by 'the sceptre of his Word'. In so saying they conveyed the notion that the sixty-six books of the Bible are the written Word of God. They are the canon or rule he has given. They form the one authoritative and definitive guide we need for all matters of faith and conduct. This principle is found in the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion - see for example Articles 6, 7 and 19 - 21.

### ***Conclusion***

Does it matter whether Junia was a man or woman? We could say, No. What matters is how we interpret Romans 16.7.

Should it be used to support the appointment of women as pastors in the church? The answer has to be, No. We have no conclusive evidence that Junia was a woman. Nor do we have conclusive evidence that Junia was an apostle. Instead we have grounds to believe that the Junia linked with Andronicus was (1) related to Paul either as a relative or fellow countryman; and (2) held in high esteem by Paul and his fellow apostles.

It is not possible to conclusively prove anything more about Junia from the verse.