

JUNIA – Romans 16:7 – Katie Day Main Points with Discussion Questions

Main Points

- Katie introduces herself and her subject by letting us see why Junia was such an important biblical character and role model in her own life. Katie's vocational journey began when she started taking courses in a theologically conservative seminary in the early 70's. There she got hooked on theology, but never considered working toward ordination. She says:

Maybe part of the reason I hadn't imagined myself as a minister was that this seminary had 750 students, only 60 of whom were women, and only 12 women were Master of Divinity students. We women were almost invisible. In chapel I only heard men's voices from the pulpit and in the singing - even though I was singing as loudly as I could!

- There were two big issues that dominated discussions in and out of the classroom at that time: women's ordination (almost all of the faculty and most of the students were against it) and hierarchical marriage: "the man is the head of the woman" —Paul's quote was weaponized to end any conversation about egalitarian relationships.
- The turning point for Katie was when she took a course entitled, "Women in the New Testament" by the Chairman of the New Testament Department, a noted scholar, Ramsey Michaels. It was a life changing and paradigm-shifting course for her in many ways. She learned to do exegesis (textual study) from the Greek text of the New Testament; saw the strong presence of women in the New Testament; and learned that the New Testament was not inherently misogynistic....but is actually liberating for women and others who have been pushed to the fringes of church and society.
- Most importantly, in this course Katie also met **Junia** for the first time --who was hidden in her Bible as "Junias," a man's name. She recalls, *"that week when we studied Junia made all the difference for me. It helped me to imagine myself as a minister, a teacher, a preacher...."*

Questions for discussion

- Think of a time when your attitudes or your direction in life changed. What contributed to those changes? How important were mentors? How hard is it to adjust once you understand things differently?
- Katie credits Dr. Ramsey Michaels with helping her to see that the New Testament does not denigrate women, rather it liberates them. She notes that there is power in teaching; it can be transformative. Think of a teacher who was a special influence in

your own life. What characteristics made that person stand out? How did (s)he change you?

A Careful Reading of the Text – Romans 16:7

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.

- There have been two major questions about this verse:
 1. the gender of the person who is listed with Andronicus. Is it Junia (female)...or is it Junias (a male)?
 2. The second question is whether Junia/Junias was actually an apostle

Examining the case for Junia

FACT # 1 - “Junia” appears only once in the Greek New Testament (here), although it was a common woman’s name in 1st century Rome (appearing over 250 times on excavated buildings, monuments, graffiti, and in literature). On the other hand, scholars have not been able to find *a single example* of a man named Junias anywhere! [Still—there’s always a first time]

FACT # 2 - There have been many translations of the Bible over last 2000 years— not all versions use the same ancient manuscripts

1. Until the 13th century, commentators and translators unanimously translated the name in Romans 16 as feminine -“Junia”- even including the Latin Vulgate, that later became the Catholic Bible.
2. Similarly, from the 1300’s-1800’s, an overwhelming majority also translated the name as “Junia.” This includes the Gutenberg Bible, Tyndale Bible, and King James Version of 1611.
3. Even recent versions of the Bible that previously used the masculine, “Junias,” changed to “Junia” when new manuscripts were found:

The New English Bible (NEB), New International Version (NIV), even the Revised Standard Version (RSV) all originally had the masculine “Junias”- with the RSV going out of its way to be clear that it was talking about two men (“Andronicus and Junias were *men of note* among the apostles”).

By contrast, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, published in 1989) uses the feminine “Junia,” but notes “Junias” as an alternate (masculine) translation.

FACT # 3 - Even the Church Fathers supported Junia, a female, as an apostle

(Church Fathers were esteemed church officials and theologians in the period from the 2nd – 7th centuries AD, whose writings established and confirmed official Christian teachings and doctrines)

**For instance, John Chrysostom, (4th century Bishop of Constantinople), wrote some pretty misogynistic things about women, but in commenting on this verse he wrote:

Greet Andronicus and Junia..who are outstanding among the apostles: To be an apostle is something great! But to be outstanding among the apostles—just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was deemed worthy of the title of apostle.

***The same was true of Origen of Alexandria, (a theologian/commentator from the 2nd century, who was closer in time to the writing of Romans (55-57 AD)

FACT # 4 - It was not until the 13th century that a commentator used the masculine form, “Junias.” This translator, historians tell us, was close to Pope Boniface VIII, who was trying to limit the influence of women in the church at the time.

FACT # 5 - The BIG TURN came with MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546) - Even though Reformation era translations overwhelmingly rendered the name as female, Martin Luther translated it as male. After that, other translations in Germany, France, and Holland followed his lead (although Italian and Spanish translators kept the feminine name).

FACT # 6 - But what about English translations? It was not until the last half of the 1800's that “Junia” suddenly became “Junias.” What could have contributed to the shift? Recall that this was era of the growing women's suffrage movement, and many theologians were speaking out about how women's leadership goes against the created order. For example, prominent Protestant theologian Horace Bushnell, writing in 1869, warned:

The look will be sharp, the voice will be wiry and shrill, the action will be angular and abrupt, wiliness, self-asserting boldness, eagerness for place and power will get into the expression more and more distinctly and become inbred in the native habit.

In other words, in periods when women were striving for their rights, translators could not imagine that this name could be referring to a woman apostle, surely it must be a typo! It must mean a man.

Questions for discussion

- After reading the 6 facts above, which are the most compelling when it comes to translating the name as “Junia?”
- Why do you think that some modern translations have persisted in translating the name as Junias (masculine)? What do you make of this?
- What pressures might Bible translators be under to render names/words in a certain way? What is at stake?

Examining the case for Junia’s status as an outstanding apostle

3 ways to translate the Greek of Romans 16:7:

1. Andronicus and Junia...they are outstanding **among** the apostles
2. Andronicus and Junia were highly regarded **by** the apostles
3. Andronicus and Junia were well known **to** the apostles

The Greek preposition (*ev*) can be translated variously as **among, by** or **to**. Translation #1 presents both people as apostles. And why might this status be warranted? Consider that they were in prison with Paul and were active Christian evangelists before he was!

Translations #2 and 3 exclude Adronicus and Junia/Junias from being apostles, though their Christian commitment is lauded by others recognized as apostles. These two translations are endorsed by faith groups that oppose women in church leadership.

Biblical scholar, Robert Jewett, in his commentary on Romans says: this verse “*should be translated “outstanding among the apostles” rather than “remarkable in the judgment of the apostles,” because the adjective episemos lifts up a person or thing as distinguished or marked in comparison with other representatives of the same class, in this instance with the other apostles.*”

Who were the apostles, and why is being one such a big deal?

The original 12 disciples were also called apostles and were the leaders of the early church. As time went on, others were added (Acts 1:15-26), including Paul (1 Corinthians 9:1 – who is always defending his apostolic status). 1 Corinthians 12:28 lists apostles in a leading role in the emerging church: “*And God has placed in the church first of all, apostles, second, prophets, third teachers...*” We know from Ephesians that apostles were to preach, equip the followers of Jesus for works of service, strengthen the whole body of believers, and

work for its unity. In short, apostleship entailed a great deal of spiritual leadership, responsibility and authority.

What is at stake in this debate about Junia being an apostle?

- Recognizing and affirming the validity and authority of women to be spiritual leaders in the church – from ancient times to the present
- When a woman's identity has been erased by so many for so long, her value is invisible. If we have learned anything in the past few weeks it is how important it is to say the names of those whose lives have been taken from them. There is power in saying the name of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and others... when we say their names, we are saying that their lives and their contributions have meaning...their lives matter.
- There is power in saying the name of the Apostle Junia— it helped a young seminarian over 40 years ago (our presenter, Katie Day) imagine her vocation in the church. She hopes it does for us too. **Say her name: Junia!**

Questions for discussion

- Upon what grounds do certain Christian denominations bar women from spiritual leadership? Why do these objections have traction? What arguments for women's church leadership are most persuasive to you?
- How have Bible translations influenced how we view the ancient church, our own church life, and the roles of men and women in service to God? What forces have shaped how various translators determined which words to use? What do you look for in selecting a version of the Bible to use?
- Katie ends by urging us to say Junia's name...as a way to value her life and keep her witness alive. Who are other Christian women whose names deserve a literal shout out?