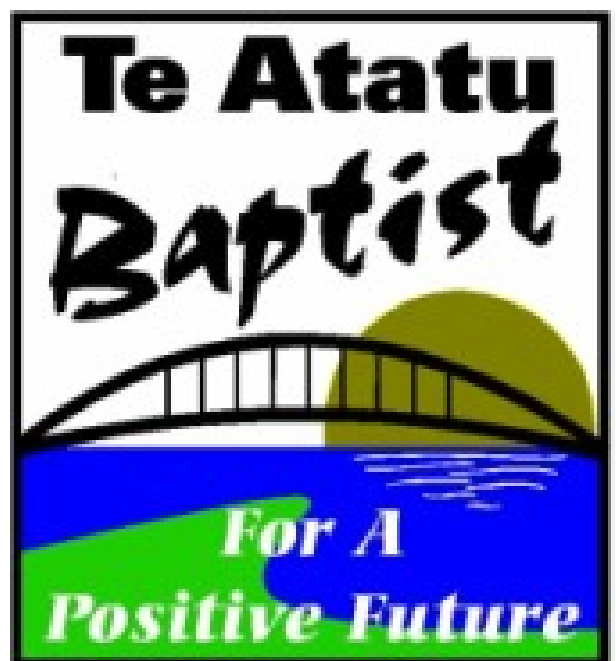


# Women in Leadership – as pastors, elders or teachers in the church!?

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Can we please turn in our Bibles to Psalm 119 verse 105.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light  
unto my path.

The psalmist is declaring some of the practical benefits of God's holy Word to us.

You see, so often people think that God and the Bible are just about *head knowledge* that has no real application to *everyday life*.

In fact I've often have people ask me why I am so interested in Theology – the study of God – when it has such little *affect* on daily life.

But the reality, is that the Bible is extremely practical!

Not only are our lives to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2), but here in the psalms, David is outlining the practical benefits of God's Word – likening it to a lamp that guides our steps and lights the path of life ahead.

You see, when the psalmist wrote this verse, those who read it would have immediately built a word picture in their minds of what he was talking about.

Shepherds in the days of David – around 1000 years before Christ, would actually tie small clay oil lamps to their ankles.

These lamps were very practical and helpful, allowing the shepherd to walk with confidence and have his hands free to either defend himself, rescue straying sheep, or carry other important items.

It wasn't like a spot-lamp or flood-light that would light the path for miles ahead, it was simply enough light and guidance to walk one step at a time.

Such is the Word of God *to us* today.

It is extremely practical and influential upon the practical and everyday events of our lives.

Theology, the study of God and the Bible – is extremely important.

In fact, the Bible says, as a person thinks in their heart, so they are. (Proverbs 23:7 KJV)

What we believe in our hearts – affects more than our mind and view of life – it actually affects our actions, choices and decisions.

In fact I want to address just one topic or issue that affects us all, and use it as an example.

I *didn't* want to teach about this previously, as I didn't want to cause an issue where one didn't exist.

But now that you have already voted and accepted Debbie as co-pastor of Te Atatu Baptist church, I want to look briefly at the Scriptures surrounding **women in leadership**.

You see, having a woman as your pastor might not be an issue here in this church – but the reality is, that for many Christians, it really *is* a big deal and something they would struggle with and even reject.

And this becomes especially difficult in light of the Scriptures that tell us to do nothing that would cause our brother to stumble! (Rom 14:21)

How much more difficult when we read verses such as:

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:34 ¶ women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

The question behind all of this is, should women be allowed to minister as Elders, Pastors and Church Leaders?’

How would you respond to a person who is genuinely wanting to know why we have a women as a pastor when the Bible so clearly teaches that we should not!

Well, I want to offer you my perspective, and in doing so help you to better understand the situation from both sides of the coin.

You need to treat today’s Bible workshop as a buffet meal, pick and choose what is relevant to you.

You see, there are many different levels and stages of maturity and education here today.

We have some very practical people who enjoy the simple things of life, and we have some intellectuals who need cognitive stimulation!

And that’s not to say that an intellectual can’t also be laid back! (It’s just that I haven’t met any like that yet! :-)

I guess what I am saying – is that not *everything* you hear from this pulpit will interest or apply to you. BUT that isn't to say it isn't of interest or application to the person sitting next to you either.

## Introduction

In discerning and discovering truth, it can be disturbing for fundamentalist Bible believers to realise that Scripture, while foundational – is *not the only* bearing point used to develop doctrine or theology.

Actually, it *never* has been.

It is not enough to say, 'This is what the Bible teaches – and I believe every word it says!', as statements like this exclude the speaker from understanding the natural bias that exists in their life – including culture, gender, education or life events. (Exegesis vs. Isogesis)

Exegesis is the technical term for knowing how to correctly read any historical document or article, understand the grammatical genre it was written in – such as hyperbole, parable, fiction, poetry, personal opinion etc.

This makes sure you don't read a parable as fact, or poetry as science!

Exegesis also enables us to understand the culture, time period and situation in which an historical piece of literature was written.

Exegesis applies to reading the Bible just as much as it does to any other ancient text.

It is quickly discoverable that any serious study on the topic of Women in Ministry as Elders, Pastors and Church Leaders – goes far beyond the topic, and quickly touches upon exegesis and more importantly the inerrancy of Scripture (I.e. is the Bible infallible and perfect in its *literal* interpretation?).

This is actually very important, and has a direct bearing on the decision we made as a church last Sunday.

Two sides of the coin emerge.

One side is towards **Literalists** who would insist believers follow the Letter (Logos) of the law within Scripture. What is written is universal and must be obeyed by all believers for all of time.

The other side is more towards **Liberalists** who would insist believers follow the Spirit (Rhema) of the Law by looking for the underlying principle that is not always obvious through a literal reading of the text.

**Literalists** would agree that women are to keep silent in church, wear head coverings and be submissive to the emotionally and mentally stronger male gender – all as a direct Scriptural commandment of God.

Following the commands of Scripture, women are prohibited from teaching men, and definitely excluded from positions of leadership that could have any authority over men.

Basically, women simply can't be *trusted* in leadership or teaching positions.

This is not a matter of equality, but of role and authority.

Women were first tempted and seduced by the devil, and this proves they are weaker of will and not suited to leadership or teaching.

Any altering from the words and commands of the Bible are seen as a threat against the inerrancy of Scripture and can only lead on a slippery slope of moral, ethical and Biblical decline.

**Liberalists** would insist that through the Cross and Redemption – male and female are equal, and that Paul’s commands were limited to a culture that diminished the personhood of woman to that of ‘Dogs and Gentiles’ and a requirement of cultural law to show humility to males by wearing head coverings and remaining uneducated (an inability to teach).

The Corinthian *Christian* woman were liberated from this bondage and were living in the freedom of Christ, but this was counterproductive to the society which they were trying to reach with the gospel, and threatened to bring undue attention and persecution.

Therefore in an attempt to reach the society for Christ, sensitivity and suppression of this freedom was required.

The underlying issue is not *women as inferior to men*, but honouring Christ in our egalitarian (Gender equal) freedom through Christ.

Basically, don’t use your freedom in Christ to distract others from hearing the gospel and coming to Christ.

In our contemporary society which is more align to the gender equality of the gospels, we now have well meaning fundamentalist Christians trying to uphold the (draconian) issue of male superiority and female inferiority – and as such are causing an insult to *our* society and turning people *away* from the gospel – the very issue **Paul was trying to combat within the Corinthian church!**

AND - each side can provide ample Scriptures and support to lend weight to their argument.

Actually, let’s briefly look again at the two passages of Scripture, and see it from both sides of the coin – from those who insist we follow the letter of the law, and then those to encourage us to follow the Spirit of the law.

# Literalists interpretation of the Scriptures

***Literalists**<sup>1</sup> who would insist believers follow the Letter (Logos) of the law within Scripture. What is written is universal and must be obeyed by all believers for all of time.*

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:34 ¶ **women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.**

The Principles of women not speaking in church services is universal; this applies to all the churches, not just locally, geographically, or culturally. The context is this verse concerns prophecy, but includes the general theme of the chapter; I.e. Tongues. Rather than leading, they (women) are to be submissive as God's Word commands. It is not coincidental that many modern churches that have tongues-speaking and claim gifts of healings and miracles also permit women to lead worship, preach and teach. Women may be gifted teachers, but they are not permitted by God to 'speak' in churches. In fact, for them to do so is 'shameful', meaning 'disgraceful'. Apparently, certain women were out of order in disruptively asking questions publicly in the chaotic services.

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:11 **A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.**

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<sup>1</sup> As a representation of a Literalistic interpretation of these verses, I refer to the works and commentary of John MacArthur. The MacArthur Study Bible. John MacArthur. Word Bibles. 1977.

11: Women are not to be the public teachers when the church assembles, but neither are they to be shut out of the learning process. The form of the Greek verb translated 'let...learn' is an imperative. Paul is commanding that woman be taught in the church. This was a novel concept, since neither first century Judaism nor Greek culture held women in high esteem. Some of the women in Ephesus probably overacted to the cultural denigration they had typically suffered and took advantage of their opportunity in the church by seeking a dominant role in leadership.

12: Paul used a verbal form of this Greek word that indicates a condition or process that is better translated; 'To be a teacher'. This was an important, official function in the church. Thus Paul is forbidding women from filling the office and role of the pastor or teacher. ...Paul forbids women from exercising any type of authority over men in the church assembly, since the elders are those who rule. They are to be men.

## Liberalists interpretation of the Scriptures

***Liberalists** who would insist believers follow the Spirit (Rhema) of the Law by looking for the underlying principle that is not always obvious through a literal reading of the text.*

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:34 ¶ women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

The reason Paul instructed the silence of woman in the church is completely limited to the context and culture to which the instruction was written.

Women were regarded as *less than slaves*.

They were treated as possessions to be manipulated, used and discarded at will by their male owners.

They were forbidden from having an education, and a common belief was that the Torah should be burnt rather than taught to a woman.

To allow women their new found freedom in Christ (Which they – and the men were allowing to be expressed) would run *counter* to their culture and bring shame upon the Christian church – by both males and females of the society, as well as the possibility of persecution from a Roman anti-Christian government.

Verse 34: What *law* is Paul referring to? There is *nothing* in the OT that inhibits women from speaking in the Synagogue.

In the early church, women sat on one side of the building and men on the other.

Imagine the commotion if an uneducated woman wanted something explained!

It just makes sense to wait until they get home to have it explained.

However, what if her husband was a non-believer, or Islamic – should she then ask him to explain the Scriptures? Surely not, as he would either kill her for her apostasy or convert her to his false religion!

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:11 **A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.**

Again, typical of the *culture* in which the letter to Timothy was written.

In a similar way to female suppression and male superiority – was acceptance of slavery.

Although widely accepted for generations to come, Christianity has actually led the way to *abolish* slavery.

Exactly the same principles should be applied to female subjugation.

It is a sad reflection of Christianity that some still lag behind in the abolishment of woman inferiority – sometimes masquerading as *misogamy* (a general hatred towards and suspicion of the female gender) or male pride and superiority.

It is argued that a hierarchical structure was the result of the fall, and has been reversed through Christ where there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28

The sin of Adam was equal to the sin of Eve.

She was deceived, but Adam directly chose to disobey God.

Both are redeemed through Jesus.

And yes, it is true that woman was created out of man, but it is also wise to remember that man was created out of dust 😊

Now, I want to finish at this point today, but I have included a study of Scripture where women acted as prophetesses, teaches, co-workers in the gospel, deacons and even possibly pastors/elders in the early church.

However, I will leave that up to you to read if you are interested.

# Other Relevant Scriptures supporting Women in Ministry and Leadership Positions<sup>2</sup>

## A. Prophetesses

Those who see no restrictions on women in ministry argue that the prophets of both the Old Testament and the New Testament were authoritative messengers of God. Women clearly functioned as prophetesses in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Miriam is explicitly called a prophetess in Exodus 15:20, and she led the women in singing for Yahweh's triumph over Egypt (Exodus 15:21). The prophetess Huldah was consulted by the messengers of Josiah in 2 Kings 22:14-20. Other women probably functioned as prophetesses in the Old Testament but are unmentioned (cf. Isaiah 8:3), and Ezekiel pronounces judgment against daughters who prophesy falsely (Ezekiel 13:17-24). Compare also Nehemiah's words against the prophetess Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14). The problem here was not that these women prophesied, but that they did not prophesy according to the word of the Lord.

For our purposes, the most significant example of a prophetess is Deborah (Judges 4:4-5). Evangelical feminists consider Deborah particularly significant because she functioned as a judge over Israel, which would include judging men, and she exercised authority over the man Barak, who was a commander of the Israelite troops.

In the New Testament, too, women prophesy, and there may even be some indication that it was more common for them to do so. The prophetess Anna thanked God and spoke of Him when Jesus was brought to the temple (Luke 2:36-38). Peter cites Joel's prophecy that when the Spirit is poured out both "sons and daughters will prophesy. . . . Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18; cf. Joel 2:28-32).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/cbmw/rbmw/chapter11.html>

Philip's four daughters are one indication that this promise was fulfilled, for they all prophesied (Acts 21:9). Paul also encourages women to prophesy, with proper adornment (1 Corinthians 11:5). Those who argue for full inclusion of women in every ministry point out that if Paul thought such prayer and prophecy were wrong, he certainly would not bother to explain in such detail how they should be adorned while they were sinning!

It is concluded, then, from both the Old Testament and the New, that women functioned as prophets, and they used this gift for the edification of the people of God. In addition, prophecy, according to those who argue for no limits on women's ministries, is defined as an authoritative declaration of God's Word; thus, if women can prophesy, they can perform any ministry. They argue that prophecy is just as important and as authoritative as teaching. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 12:28, the gift of prophecy is ranked *above* teaching. Now, nearly everyone agrees that women can function as prophets, for the evidence here is clear, but if women can function as prophets, it would seem that they can also function as teachers today, because prophecy is just as authoritative as teaching.

## **B. Women Teachers and Spiritual Gifts**

Moreover, those who contend for no restrictions on women in ministry argue that women function as teachers. When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos teach, they took him aside and explained the gospel more accurately to him (Acts 18:26). The inclusion of Priscilla indicates that she must have taught Apollos as well. In fact, Luke mentions her first, and some suggest this implies that she did more of the teaching. Such ministry by Priscilla does not seem to be a one-time affair. In Romans 16:3, Paul greets both Priscilla and Aquila. He labels them his fellow-workers in the gospel, which implies that they shared in the gospel ministry with him. Their involvement in ministry is also confirmed by 1 Corinthians 16:19, for there Paul says that a church is in their house.

The argument for women teachers is also set forth from spiritual gifts. Teaching is a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:12; Romans 12:7), and yet there is no indication that women are excluded from this gift. All Christians are told to teach one another (Colossians 3:16) and to share with the community what they have learned (1 Corinthians 14:26). Surely this must include women. Indeed, Priscilla, as we have seen above, seems to use the gift in instructing Apollos. Paul also mentions women in the role of teaching in Titus 2:3.

Those who advocate no restrictions on women in ministry say that passages like 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 should not be used to impose limitations on women today. First Timothy 2:11-15, they say, was not written to forbid all teaching of men by women. Paul here is only forbidding false teaching by women, or (according to others) preventing women who were uneducated from teaching men. First Corinthians 14:33b-36 was probably written to resolve a problem in the congregation where women were disrupting the assembly by speaking in tongues or by interrupting the service with questions. Or perhaps the passage quotes a Corinthian slogan or question that Paul rejects. Some also think that verses 34-35 were not part of the original text of 1 Corinthians and that they were added by a later scribe. These two passages, therefore, are designed to correct abuses by women in teaching, it is argued, not to forbid any teaching of men whatsoever. The fact that women could prophesy, which, it is claimed, cannot be distinguished from authoritative teaching, and that Priscilla engages in teaching, shows that the prohibitions in these two passages are not absolute.

### **C. Women as Fellow-workers and Laborers**

It has already been noted that in Romans 16:3 Paul calls Priscilla a "fellow worker" (*sunergos*). It is instructive to note others who are called Paul's fellow workers: Timothy (Romans 16:21; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; Philemon 1), Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:9), Urbanus (Romans 16:9), Titus (2 Corinthians 8:23), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), Aristarchus (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24), Mark (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24), Jesus Justus (Colossians 4:10), Epaphras

(Philemon 24), Demas (Philemon 24), and Luke (Philemon 24). Some of those listed here we know very little about, but we know that Timothy, Apollos, Titus, Epaphroditus, Mark, Epaphras, and Luke proclaimed the gospel. Does it not follow, then, say those who espouse full inclusion of women in every ministry, that Priscilla as a fellow worker did the same? Moreover, Priscilla is not the only woman whom Paul calls a fellow-worker. In Philippians 4:2, he exhorts two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to agree in the Lord. In 4:3, he says that they struggled together with him in the gospel along with Clement and the rest of the fellow-workers. The implication is that Euodia and Syntyche were fellow-workers. They struggled together in the gospel by helping Paul spread the good news of salvation.

The point can even be made more specific. In 1 Corinthians 16:16, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be subject to the house of Stephanas and to "every fellow worker (*panti sunergounti*) and laborer (*kopionti*)." We have already seen that three women are called fellow workers: Priscilla, Euodia, and Syntyche. Paul says that the Corinthians are to be subject to all fellow-workers and laborers. It would seem to follow, according to those who reject any limits on women today, that since Priscilla, Euodia, and Syntyche were fellow-workers, these women held leadership positions in the church and, therefore, men were subject to them.

It is also noted that Paul says to be subject to "every laborer" (*panti . . . kopionti*) as well as every fellow worker (1 Corinthians 16:16). Paul often describes his ministry using this same word for labor (1 Corinthians 4:12; 15:10; Galatians 4:11; Philippians 2:16; Colossians 1:29; 1 Timothy 4:10). Indeed, the work of other leaders is also described in terms of laboring. The Corinthians are to submit to the house of Stephanas, which labors for them (1 Corinthians 16:16). The Thessalonians are exhorted "to respect those who work hard [or *labor*] among you" (1 Thessalonians 5:12), and these are clearly the leaders, because Paul goes on to say that they are "over you in the Lord and admonish you." The elders who rule well should receive double honor, according to 1 Timothy 5:17, "especially those whose work is

preaching and teaching." Clearly, then, Paul often uses the verb *labor* to denote authoritative ministry and instruction. But Paul also mentions women who have labored. In Romans 16:6, he instructs the Romans to greet Mary, who labored much for them. And in Romans 16:12, three women, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, are said to have labored much in the Lord. Some conclude, therefore, that women were leaders in the congregations, for the word *labor* is clearly used in this sense in 1 Corinthians 16:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, and 1 Timothy 5:17.

#### **D. Women Deacons**

It is also argued that women functioned in official positions in the church because they held the office of deacon. Many scholars have argued that this is the most probable interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:11. In 1 Timothy 3:8-10 and 12, the qualifications are given for men who are to serve as deacons. In 3:11, Paul says: "Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things" (*NASB*). The word for "women" here (*gunaikas*) could be translated "wives" (as in *NIV*), and that is the view of some commentators. The following reasons are given to support the idea that Paul is speaking of women deacons: (1) Paul introduces the women mentioned here in the same fashion he introduced the men in 1 Timothy 3:8, i.e., he uses the word *likewise*. In 3:1-7, Paul lays out the qualifications for elders, and in 3:8 Paul says likewise there are similar qualifications for deacons. The *likewise* in 3:11 suggests that the qualifications for men who are deacons also apply to women deacons.

(2) If Paul were speaking of wives of deacons, he could have made this very clear by adding of *deacons* (*diakonon* or *auton*). By leaving the word *women* without any modifier, he implied that he was speaking of women in general, not just of the wives of deacons. (3) The qualifications Paul mentions in 3:12 are identical with or similar to those required of deacons, and this suggests that an office is in view. {2}

Further evidence that women functioned as deacons is found in the case of Phoebe. In Romans 16:1, Paul says that she was "a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae" (*RSV*). Actually, the word *deaconess* here is the same as the one used in 1 Timothy 3:8 and Philippians 1:1, where Paul writes of deacons. Thus, Paul is not calling Phoebe a "deaconess," but a "deacon," some have claimed. In addition, Phoebe is called a leader (*prostatis*) in Romans 16:2. The most commonly used translations (*RSV, NASB, NIV*) use the word *help* or *helper* here, but it has been claimed that this term is a technical one used for a legal protector or leader. If such an interpretation is correct, Paul here recommends Phoebe as a deacon and as a leader of many.

### **E. Women Elders**

Evidence is also adduced that women could function as elders. The letter of 2 John is addressed to "the chosen lady," and it is claimed that this does not refer to the church as a whole because the chosen lady is distinguished from her children (2 John 1, 4). The "chosen lady" refers to a woman who had authority over her children. Such authority is similar to the office of elder. Moreover, some suggest that Paul speaks of women elders in Titus 2:3. Although this is obscured by translations that render *presbytidas* by "older women," it is clear that this word is a feminine rendering of the term *presbyteros* (*elder*) that Paul uses in Titus 1:5 to refer to church office.

### **F. Women Apostles**

Most significantly, it is frequently claimed that women also functioned as apostles. In Romans 16:7, Paul writes, "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles. . . ." Some commentators have thought that Junias was a man, and that the name here is a contracted form of the word *Junianus*. Nevertheless, this is said to be an unpersuasive argument, for there is no example in Greek literature of this name being contracted. Thus, some have said that the name should be translated "Junia" (feminine) rather than "Junias" (masculine), showing that a woman is almost certainly included

among the apostles here. Others have contended that the Greek (*en tois apostolois*) means "outstanding in the eyes of the apostles," not "outstanding among the apostles." Of course, such a rendering would exclude Andronicus and Junia(s) from the apostolic circle. The text would simply say that the apostles held them in high esteem. But it is claimed that this is an unnatural way to understand the Greek, and the most probable rendering is "outstanding among the apostles." To sum up: there seems to be evidence here that a woman was an apostle, and this raises a serious question against those who want to deny women full participation in leadership positions in the church.

## **G. Conclusion**

To sum up, the argument often given for full inclusion in ministry is cumulative. Women functioned as prophets, and such a ministry is just as authoritative as teaching. Women possess all the spiritual gifts, and this includes the gifts of teaching and leadership. Indeed, there is evidence in the New Testament that women held the offices of deacon, elder, and apostle. All of this evidence is in accord with Paul's designation of women as fellow-workers in the gospel. The passages that seem to limit women in ministry can be explained from the situation that Paul addresses and thus should not be used to impose restrictions on women.