

## **AN EXAMPLE OF NEW EVANGELICAL HERMENEUTICS: REINTERPRETATING THE BIBLE TO JUSTIFY FEMALE PASTORS... ...WITH A BIBLICAL REBUTTAL & SUPPLEMENTARY QUOTES**

J. Oswald Sanders is a very well-known and highly respected missionary statesman. So it is disappointing to see him cave in to the pressures of today's society and exaggerate and reinterpret Bible verses in order to be able to claim that ministry-wise, women should be able to do everything that men do. But Sanders does so in a book he has written, and he does so in a very convincing way. I wonder how many of us can see the flaws in his arguments? If, after reading his statements you are having trouble refuting him, you will then understand how so many former fundamentalists have been pulled over into the new evangelical camp. I will quote him extensively, before briefly refuting his statements<sup>1</sup>:

*“(Regarding I Tim. 2:12) ...in the Greek there is a present active verb here which can be translated, ‘I am not **presently** permitting a woman to teach or to have authority over men.’ Paul was apparently prohibiting those who were not properly instructed from teaching (sic)... When existing conditions are taken into consideration, we see that the restrictions Paul made were reasonable and necessary. **But are they equally applicable in the cultural milieu of our own times?** ...If men alone are appointed to positions where these gifts may be exercised, **is the purpose of the Spirit’s gifts being frustrated and the church being impoverished?** **The Spirit of God has expressly endowed some women in both the Old and New Testaments with powers of leadership**, as though to show that He reserves this right, even though the vast majority of leaders have been men.’ Both the Bible (Old and New Testaments) and various accounts of church history (past and present) provide examples of godly women exercising a fruitful ministry in prophecy, administration, evangelism, and teaching. Where there is a wooden adherence to Pauline prohibitions **in today’s changed situation**, sterility and frustration very often result. On the other hand, the undoubted spiritual release and fruitfulness that has followed **the ministry of such women as Catherine Booth, Ruth Paxson, Henrietta Mears, Geraldine Howard Taylor, Isabel Kuhn, and many others has to be accounted for** if the negative interpretation is the correct one...In 1885, the China Inland Mission opened centers on the populous Kwang Sin River that were conducted by single women. Thirty years later there was a complete chain of ten central stations, sixty outstations, over, 2,200 communicants, and large numbers of enquirers, pupils in schools, etc... Those ladies were still the only foreign missionaries alongside the native pastors, whom they had trained...*

*If it is objected, ‘But we must go by Scripture and not by experience,’ the objection is valid. **But we must make sure that we have rightly interpreted Scripture**... Priscilla... appears to have been more dynamic than her husband Aquila, but together **they functioned as a husband-wife pastoral team**... That she exercised a teaching ministry is explicitly cited in Scripture (Acts 18:26), for she and her husband took the eloquent Apollos to their home and thoroughly explained the way of God... Junias... was stated to be a woman by both Chrysostom and Theophylact. Ancient commentators concluded that Andronicus and Junias were a married couple...Although there is no absolute certainty, there are reasonable grounds for regarding Junias as an apostle in the limited sense (!)... In I Corinthians 14:3, he specifies (prophesying’s) nature and function... Would it not be strange for Paul to permit women to exercise the higher gift of prophecy, yet forbid the less important gift of teaching? ...**All these scriptural passages, when taken together, comprise a good case for maintaining that the command to keep silence in the early church was not absolute**... ‘That some women today have a gift for teaching and applying the Bible can hardly be denied...Prima facie, then, (it’s a fact then, that) God intends some women to teach and preach.’...In the light of what has been written, **Paul appears to accord to women a satisfying, if not dominant role in the***

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<sup>1</sup> This is just a brief excerpt from a much more extensive paper I produced & distributed after speaking at the National Baptist Pastors Conference, Kerowagi, Chimbu, Papua New Guinea in Nov. 2003. The paper was titled: “*The Various Groups in Protestant Christianity Today - An explanation of the religious positions of: Liberalism, Neo-Orthodoxy, New Evangelicalism, & Fundamentalism.*”

*realms of prayer, teaching, evangelizing, and administration.* As stated earlier, there is no scriptural precedent for women holding a dominant role in leadership or in theology. But in his administration of the universal church and the execution of the Great Commission, *the Holy Spirit has given a much wider scope of ministry to women than is usually accorded to them in our churches.*<sup>2</sup>

## REBUTTAL:

1. **His appeal to the verb tense and his retranslation (i.e. “presently”) in I Tim. 2:12 is forced and contrived.** I consulted 15 different translations in two different languages. NONE of them gave a reading other than one which completely forbids women to teach or lead in the church! **Not one of them had a reading remotely resembling, or even hinting at Sanders’ rendering—even the most liberal paraphrases!** The translations I consulted ranged all the way from conservative “word for word” (formal correspondence) translations, such as the KJV, NKJV, NASV & ESV, to loose paraphrases such as The Living Bible, NT-Easy to Read Version, & The Amplified NT, as well as and “dynamic equivalence” versions like The NIV & The New English Bible. In addition, the wording in both existing Pidgin translations (*Buk Baibel*-PNG Bible Society & *King Jems Nupela Testamen*-Bearing Precious Seed Ministries) totally bar women from any pastoral/teaching ministry in the church, as do several other versions, including the Roman Catholic Challoner-Rheims Bible.<sup>3</sup> A comparison of the Greek via The Greek Interlinear Bible completely supports this viewpoint, transliterating the verse: *“but a woman to teach I do not allow, nor to exercise authority over man, but to be in quietness”*<sup>4</sup>
2. Sanders in his book list’s some cultural absurdities saying that such practices explain why Paul forbade women from being leaders in the churches in NT times. But he then asks rhetorically, “*But are they (i.e. such restrictions) equally applicable in the cultural milieu of our own times?*” **What’s he really saying? That since our culture is different than the one that existed in NT times, consequently Paul’s command doesn’t apply to us today!** That argument is used simply to get rid of biblical commands or principles that Christians today don’t wish to obey. **On the contrary, Paul never said, “Because of our backward, first-century culture, women are not to preach.”!** The command was clear, and intended to be permanent.
3. Sanders also says that if women can’t preach, then the purpose of the Spirit’s gifts is frustrated. **It is NOT frustrated! Women can and should teach and exercise their gifts-but in the right situations and to the correct audiences.** Gifted women can speak to other women; can teach children and young people, etc. The wife of the recently retired senior pastor in one of our supporting churches in America has had a very fruitful ministry with and among women across the United States and even overseas, for more than four decades! But it is a ministry among women, not to men! She is using the gift the Spirit has given her, in a biblical way!
4. Sanders apparently realizes that **he is arguing for women in ministry on the basis of experience rather than Scripture**, and he acknowledges as much. In appealing to experience and anecdotal illustrations, he is no different in his reasoning than Mormons, Charismatics, Roman Catholics, and other religions and cults who justify themselves and their practices on the basis of results &/or experiences. **It is an argument from pragmatism (i.e. whatever works must be ok) and is unbiblical. In Romans 3:8 Paul condemns such an “end justifies the means” philosophy.**

<sup>2</sup> “*Paul the Leader*,” by J. Oswald Sanders. Navpress: Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1984, pp. 165-171.

<sup>3</sup> The translations I consulted were: The King James Version (KJV), The New King James Version (NKJV), The New American Standard Version (NASV), The English Standard Version (ESV), The New International Version (NIV), The Contemporary English Version (CEV), The Living Bible, The Amplified New Testament, The New Testament: Easy-to-Read Version, The New English Bible-NT, Buk Baibel, The King James Nupela Testamen, The Challoner-Rheims Version, The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, & even the (JW) New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures.

<sup>4</sup> Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978 reprint of 1897 edition.

Instead, in another place he highly commended the Bereans for their practice of carefully checking his teaching to see if it was biblical or not (Acts 17:11). **Please note that the Bereans didn't determine if Paul was an apostle by what they saw, or whether or not it appeared that God was "using" Paul in a special way** i.e. it wasn't based on whether or not people were getting healed, "*coming to Christ*," etc. No, their basis for determining right and wrong was the Bible and the Bible alone! (cf. Isa. 8:20)

5. Sanders also subtly chastises those who would appeal to Scripture as the final authority on this issue, **implying that such individuals do not know how to interpret Scripture correctly** ("*...but we must make sure that we have rightly interpreted Scripture...*"). **In actual fact, it appears that he is the one who is guilty of misinterpreting and misrepresenting Scripture! He labels Priscilla & Aquila a "husband-wife pastoral team."** **However there is no biblical basis for such a statement.** His comment that Priscilla "*...appears to be more dynamic than her husband...*" is without any genuine support. And **the fact that the two of them sat Apollos down and privately straightened out some of his faulty theology, has absolutely no bearing on the issue of whether women can preach or pastor.** If my wife and I were to hear a traveling evangelist preaching in the National Park in Goroka, and we noticed that a few of his statements were not quite correct biblically, we might feel led to invite him over to our house for lunch & have a private chat with him in order to give him some suggestions and personal criticisms. That would in NO way imply that my wife could be a preacher!
  
6. Concerning the need to follow good principles of Bible interpretation, **it appears that Sanders himself has not done his homework thoroughly, &/or is only giving partial information in regard to Junias (Rom. 16:7).** He states that since two early church writers said Junias was female, and he assumes Andronicus and Junias were a husband and wife team, therefore the issue is settled. Not so fast! Bible teacher Dr. Gil Rugh has pointed out that a group of college students **did a computer search for the name "Junias" in all of the Greek documents existing from the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. up through the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.** What they found was very interesting. **The name Junias occurs only three times in all of that Greek literature, apart from the mention of the name in Romans 16! Two of those references state that Junias was a woman. The other one says he was a man! A fourth reference is found in a Latin (not Greek) manuscript containing the early church father Origen's comments on Romans 16. In that manuscript Origen also states that Junias was a man. So two sources say Junias was a man and two say Junias was a woman! The obvious conclusion: We really don't know!** As for the statement that Andronicus and Junias were "*...outstanding among the apostles*", Rugh points out that can mean that either they were outstanding apostles, or that they were outstanding in the eyes of the apostles. There is nothing conclusive in that. In addition, most believers are aware that the term translated "*apostle*," like the term *deacon*, is sometimes used in a general, sense and other times to refer to a specific office.<sup>5</sup> **So that is inconclusive as well.** As to who Andronicus and Junias were, some (especially feminists & advocates of women preachers) believe Andronicus and Junias were a husband and wife team like Priscilla and Aquila. But **in Romans 16:12 we have two names used together in a similar fashion, both of whom are women. So obviously two people of the same sex could and sometimes were listed together. So Andronicus and Junias could have even been two men!** We really don't know.

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<sup>5</sup> "*Apostolos* is, lit., one sent forth (*apo*, from, *stello*, to send). The word is used of the Lord Jesus to describe His relation to God, Heb. 3:1; see John 17:3. The twelve disciples chosen by the Lord...Paul... 'The word has also a wider reference. In Acts 14:4, 14, it is used of Barnabas as well as of Paul; in Rom. 16:7 of Andronicus and Junias. In 2 Cor. 8:23 two unnamed brethren are called "apostles of the churches;" in Phil. 2:25 Ephaphroditus is referred to as "your apostle." It is used in I Thess. 2:6 of Paul, Silas and Timothy, to define their relation to Christ.'" (W.E. Vine, "*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*". [Fleming H. Revell Company: Old Tappan, NJ, 1966 ed.], p. 63). Missionaries have often been referred to in sermons, etc., as "apostles" or "sent ones", since they are sent out by local churches to other countries and peoples with the gospel.

7. **THE KEY POINT TO LEARN FROM ALL THIS:** *“If you’re going to build your doctrine of the role of a woman, you don’t build it on people like “Phoebe,” “Priscilla & Aquila,” “Junias,” etc. You don’t build your theology on passages that are (simply) giving a greeting to someone (especially someone) that we don’t even know if they are male or female!! Instead, we must go to the passages that address that subject, such as I Cor. 11 & 14; I Tim. 2; Titus 2; Eph. 5 & I Pet. 3!”*<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately feminists and their supporters do not spend much time in those passages, since they give no support to the idea that women are allowed to be pastors, preachers and evangelists!
  
8. **Sanders appeals to women in the Old & New Testaments who allegedly had “powers of leadership” -but none of those women were pastors, preachers, priests, or anything similar!** Deborah in the book of Judges worked alongside a weak leader named Barak-but that is a far cry from a woman in spiritual ministry! **Please be reminded that being a political leader in OT times was not equivalent in any way to being a leader in the church**-a spiritual body which didn’t come into existence until New Testament times! Being a political leader wasn’t even equal to being involved in spiritual ministry in Old Testament times, when worship centered first around the Tabernacle in the wilderness, then later at the Temple in Jerusalem. In fact, women were forbidden from serving as priests in Old Testament times (cf. Lev. 8-9; etc) viii) Sanders’ reference to I Cor. 14 likewise does not stand up under scrutiny, since in that context, women are forbidden both to speak in tongues and to prophesy (14:34).
  
9. **No one denies “...that some women have a gift for teaching and applying the Bible...” Virtually everybody acknowledges that fact! That is a “straw man” argument.** And to say that because some women are gifted in teaching God’s word that consequently they must serve as pastors and teachers **is a “non sequitur” i.e. a conclusion which does not follow.** It *especially* does not follow when all the major passages in the New Testament that deal with the role of women in both the church and the home directly oppose such a viewpoint! It is thus shown to be completely false!
  
10. **Finally, Sanders seriously over-exaggerates the situation** when he says *“Paul appears to accord to women a satisfying, if not dominant role in the realms of prayer, teaching, evangelizing, and administration.”*<sup>7</sup> **Such a statement is patently false, as any serious examination of Scripture will reveal.**

**Here I would like to include some comments on the subject of women preachers and pastors by two well-known pastors & Bible teachers: Dr. Gil Rugh and Dr. John MacArthur. I think the reader will find their comments extremely enlightening and helpful:**

**Dr. Gil Rugh, Pastor of Indian Hills Community Church, Lincoln, Nebraska:**<sup>8</sup>

*“...we do not realize our potential in glorifying God as He intended, unless we function as He intended us to function... Deborah and Huldah (in the OT) were prophetesses, but they were not allowed to be teachers of the people, because that was the role of the priests, and no women were allowed to be priests!*

*“...To be a “Christian feminist” is to deny and distort Scripture ... (in regard to the command for women to keep silent in church in I Cor. 14) they say there were arguments back and forth across the church aisle. They say it’s cultural. But Paul says (14:34), ‘just as the law says!’ Now we don’t find a verse that has that law per se, but if we look at I Peter 3:5-6 Peter says that the Old Testament taught that godly women were*

<sup>6</sup> Information and quotes taken from a sermon on Romans 16 preached by Dr. Gil Rugh, pastor, Indian Hills Community Church, Lincoln, Nebraska. (Sound Words: Lincoln, Nebraska, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Sanders, op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>8</sup> I personally transcribed the statements quoted here from a tape of a sermon preached by Dr. Rugh.

to be quiet and submissive and then it gives Sarah as an example. **Paul concludes then in 14:37 (by saying) ‘if you’re spiritual you’ll do what I say!’**

“...(regarding I Tim. 2:10 it says) ‘she is to receive instruction with all submissiveness.’ The twisting of the meaning of the words here (are) just that-twisting! (These) **were not culturally-based teachings, but theological and creative** (i.e. based on): a) the order of creation, &, b) the fall (woman led in it)...

“Someone may say, ‘yeah, but in Titus 2:3 it says women are to teach what is good, so I Timothy 2 doesn’t apply to us today!’ But the first rule of Bible interpretation is, **CONTEXT DETERMINES MEANING**. Please note that that’s not the end of the sentence (in Titus 2:3)! It says, ‘older women are to...teach younger women... to love their husbands and children, etc. (In other words, it does not refer to women teaching and preaching at all!)...

“OT priests could ONLY be men...”

“In I Corinthians 11 (it teaches that)...man does not originate from woman, but woman from man. The order of Genesis 2 is **KEY**, which is why feminists often reject Genesis chapter two! ... (this passage also makes clear that)...there should be a recognizable difference between a man’s and a woman’s hair style ... (Paul concludes in 11:16) ... **‘this is the way it is. There is nothing to debate. All the churches practice this.’**...In conclusion, **we don’t build our doctrine from the greetings in Romans 16.**”<sup>9</sup>

**Dr. John MacArthur makes some excellent observations to Old & New Testament prophetesses, etc:**

**“IN THE OLD TESTAMENT...”**

“...Although women shared spiritual equality with men in the Old Testament, they did not have the same role...They did not serve as leaders...Deborah was a judge who acted primarily in the role of an arbiter, not as an ongoing leader. That explains why she called on Barak when needing military leadership against the Canaanites (Judg. 4-5) Queen Athaliah was a usurper and not a legitimate ruler (2 Kings 11).

**“There is no mention of women priests in the Old Testament. As far as we know, no woman wrote any portion of the Old Testament... They had no ongoing prophetic ministry...such as that of Elisha or Elijah.**

“There are five women in the Old Testament who are referred to as **prophetesses**. **Miriam (Ex. 15:20)**. Perhaps she is called a prophetess because she gives a brief revelation in verse 21. We know of no other occasion when she acted in the prophetic office ...**Deborah** is described as a prophetess in **Judges 4:4** because she was used by God to give a direct revelation to Barak. We know of no other occasion when she engaged in ongoing prophetic work ...**Huldah** gave revelation from God to Hilkiah the priest and other men about the coming judgment on Jerusalem and Judah (**2 Kings 22:14-22; 2 Chron. 34:22-28**). There is no other recorded instance of her speaking as a prophetess ...**Noadiah** was a false prophetess who opposed the work of Nehemiah in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (**Neh. 6:14**) ...**Isaiah’s wife** is called a prophetess in **Isaiah 8:3** because she gives birth to a child whose name had prophetic meaning. There is no record of her speaking a prophecy. This passage (clearly) indicates that the word prophetess can be used in a general way...

(cont.)

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<sup>9</sup> Rugh, op. cit.

## **“IN THE NEW TESTAMENT...**

“... The spiritual equality of men and women is declared in **Galatians 3:28**... In the context of Galatians 3, the oneness spoken of here is the oneness of salvation. That is clear from verses 13-27. Paul's point is that all people-Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free men, men and women-have equal access to the salvation that is in Christ. **The passage has nothing to do with the role of women in the church, nor does it teach that all differences are eliminated among Christians.** A Jewish person did not cease to be Jewish when he became a Christian, and slaves did not automatically become free men. Some distinctions were retained... (Women) did not serve as leaders.

**“There is no record in the New Testament of a woman apostle, pastor, teacher, evangelist, or elder. The New Testament does not record any sermon or teaching by a woman**

“...(women) **did not have an ongoing prophetic role.** Some argue that the **daughters of Philip** prophesied (Acts 21:9). However, they are not referred to as prophets, nor is there any indication of how often they prophesied. They may have spoken on only one occasion, as Deborah and Miriam apparently did in the Old Testament. The New Testament records other occasions when women spoke the word of God. **Mary**, the mother of Jesus speaks the Word of God in Luke 1:46-55.

“First Corinthians 11:5 says that women who prophesy are to have their heads covered. Acts 2:17 speaks of women prophesying. The Greek word translated ‘prophesy’ simply means ‘to speak forth’ or ‘to proclaim.’ There are times and places when women speak the word of God, but that is distinctly different from being identified as a pastor, teacher, elder, evangelist, or apostle.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “God’s High Calling for Women,” by Dr. John MacArthur, Jr. Moody Press: Chicago, Illinois, 1987, pp. 26-29.