

WHAT WINGER PRESENTLY GETS WRONG:

WOMEN LEADERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

[29 November 2022]

Our full two-part article takes up Mike Winger's kind invitation to give feedback. In all, it's 55 pages and we hope you will enjoy reading it. But here's a quick summary in only two pages.

QUICK SUMMARY OF ARTICLE ON NT WOMEN by Andrew Bartlett and Terran Williams

PART A

We found many mistakes in Mike's video on NT women. Surprising though it may be, there are big and sometimes elementary errors in his research and reasoning and he has misunderstood and misrepresented what other scholars have written.

We first explore the powerful drivers that have contributed to those mistakes. Then we consider three topics in Part A and two further topics in Part B.

1. Qualifications for elders

We explain why, in NT times, it could not simply be *assumed* that women should be excluded from church eldership. If there was to be a rule excluding women from being appointed as elders, it needed to be laid down in definite terms and clearly communicated to the churches.

Paul sets out qualifications for church elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 (and also a little more briefly in Titus 1:5-9).

Mike thinks that the qualifications are masculine and they plainly require that all elders be men. He sees this as a very strong argument against the egalitarian position that women may be elders.

But Mike's consideration of this central passage is superficial. It contains elementary errors. We lay out how the Greek text of Paul's list of qualifications contains indications of gender-neutrality and is capable of applying to women, as is apparent from closely examining it, which Mike omits to do.

Prominent *complementarian* scholars fairly acknowledge that the qualifications or indicators set out by Paul do not exclude women. Even the Statement of Faith of the association to which Mike's own church belongs does not rely on 1 Timothy 3 (or Titus 1) for its ban on women elders.

In short, a definite and clearly communicated rule excluding women from eldership is absent from precisely the place where we would expect to see it, if it existed. This is a fundamental weakness in any complementarian position on women's ministry.

2. Qualifications for women deacons

Mike interprets 1 Timothy 3:11 as qualifications for women deacons. We agree that this is a justifiable interpretation.

Mike thinks that this shows, by contrast, that no women may be elders.

We explain why that is a misunderstanding, which largely flows from his insufficient attention to the qualifications for elders.

3. Church hosts

Egalitarian scholars claim that, because NT women hosted churches in their houses, they probably became elders/overseers of those churches. This is to be inferred from what is in the text of the NT and from historical knowledge of the responsibilities of householders in Greco-Roman culture.

Mike disagrees. He says that this is a ‘completely false’ claim, a ‘serious, egregious scholarly error’. He gives nine reasons.

We examine his reasons and find that Mike mis-reads and misunderstands the writings of a number of scholars and approaches the matter as if considering what arrangements would be likely in 21st century California. In fact, the claim is well supported.

PART B

4. Priscilla

Mike correctly notes that Priscilla, with her husband Aquila, taught Christian doctrine to a man, Apollos. But he asserts that she did not teach him with authority.

We look at a timeline of Priscilla’s and Aquila’s relationship with the apostle Paul and at the circumstances presented in the NT text. We discover that Mike’s examination of the biblical evidence about Priscilla is superficial and his interpretation is unrealistic. It becomes clear that Priscilla and Aquila were trained and authorized by Paul to engage in ministry as pastor-teachers overseeing the fledgling church in Ephesus.

5. Phoebe

Mike affirms that Phoebe carried Paul’s letter to Rome (Romans 16:1-2). He also gives good reasons for concluding that Phoebe was probably a deacon, despite the ESV’s translation as ‘servant’. However, he balks at the idea that Phoebe, as the letter-carrier, probably explained Paul’s letter to the Romans. He says there is no evidence for it. It is ‘weird’.

But Mike’s understanding of how a long letter would be sent and received in the ancient world is deficient. We refer to serious historical research based on study of primary sources – research which Mike did not consider. We conclude that Phoebe, as Paul’s authorized representative, was very probably the first person to explain to an assembled church Paul’s letter to the Romans.