Who Is He Talking To?

"To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints." (Romans 1:7, ESV)

Who is he talking to?

It is a question we seldom ask when reading one of Paul's letters. We know he wrote Romans to Christians in Rome, Corinthians to Christians in Corinth, and Galatians to the churches of Galatia. But listen carefully to the language as the letter continues.

"Brothers." "Sons." "Fathers." "Sons of God."

A woman reading Scripture might reasonably stop and wonder, Is he talking to me?

For much of the history covered by Scripture, society was unmistakably patriarchal. Men commonly represented households. Genealogies ordinarily traced fathers and sons. Kings were men. Priests were men. Public authority rested principally with men. It is therefore hardly surprising that the language of Scripture frequently sounds masculine to modern ears.

But does masculine language mean that God's Word is principally addressed to men while women listen from somewhere nearby?

Romans gives us an interesting answer.

Paul begins by addressing *"all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints."* Then, throughout the letter, he repeatedly addresses his readers as brothers. If that were all we had, someone might conclude that Paul had men principally in mind.

Then we reach Romans 16.

There we meet Phoebe, whom Paul commends to the church. There is Prisca, his fellow worker in Christ Jesus. There are Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, and other women whom Paul knows by name and recognizes for their service to Christ.

They had been there all along.

When Paul was teaching the Roman Christians about sin, he was talking to them. When he explained justification by faith, he was talking to them. When he described life in the Spirit, he was talking to them. When he spoke of being children of God and heirs with Christ, he was talking to them.

The women were not overhearing somebody else's letter.

The same principle appears much earlier in Scripture. When Moses commanded that the Law be read publicly before Israel, he said:

"Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God." (Deuteronomy 31:12, ESV)

The women were summoned.

God did not give His Word to the men and permit the women to listen. He called the women to hear because His covenant Word belonged to them as surely as it belonged to their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons.

That matters when Scripture is read today.

A Christian woman should not have to approach her Bible as though she were reading correspondence addressed to someone else and then searching for the portions that might also apply to her. When God speaks to His people, she stands among His people.

Certainly there are passages addressed specifically to men and others specifically to women. Scripture recognizes those distinctions. But when Paul calls the church "brothers," or speaks to believers as "sons of God," the woman in Christ has not suddenly disappeared from the congregation.

She is there. She is listening. And God is speaking to her.

Perhaps that is something worth remembering the next time familiar biblical language makes it sound as though only the men are in the room.

Look around again.

The daughters are there too.

And when God speaks to His people, He is talking to them.

Just a thought.

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