



# The Making of Biblical Womanhood

by **BETH ALLISON BARR**

## GROUP STUDY GUIDE



### CHAPTER 1

1. According to Russell Moore, “Christian patriarchy” refers only to a wife’s submission to her husband. In your experience with Christian culture, what are some ways you have seen women expected to submit to men other than their husbands?
2. If we find women historically fulfilling similar supporting and subordinate roles, both inside and outside the influence of the Bible, what could that indicate regarding the origins of those roles?
3. Barr proposes that patriarchy in Scripture exists because of “the fall.” What are the ramifications of this for the roles of women? When you think of the other commonly understood consequences of the fall (work being difficult, pain in childbirth, etc.), do we tend to live with those consequences, or do we try to overcome them?
4. Barr distinguishes between what is “prescriptive” in Scripture as opposed to what is “descriptive” in Scripture. When it comes to women’s roles, how might we distinguish between what Scripture merely describes versus what it prescribes?
5. In Galatians 3 we are told that in Christ, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” ([Gal. 3:28], NRSV). Despite this, many Christians of the past have argued in favor of anti-Semitism and the institution of slavery. What similarities or differences exist in modern arguments for the continued submission of women to men?

### CHAPTER 2

1. What pressures do women (or as a woman yourself) experience regarding job and career choices? What is the message that women often get from Christian culture?
2. What passages regarding the roles of men and women have been the most difficult or challenging for you? Based on what you have read in this chapter, what do you think Paul was trying to accomplish in that passage?
3. What is the significance of a woman anointing Jesus with oil?
4. If Paul was indeed subverting the Roman household codes rather than affirming them, then how does that change the relationship between Christian husbands and wives?
5. What translations of the Bible have you primarily used throughout your life? How do these translate the passages describing the roles of women, and what impact has this had on you?
6. If you believed that men and women were permitted to hold equal leadership roles in the church and in the home, what would it cost you?

## CHAPTER 3

1. What significance can we attach to the fact that women are the first witnesses to Jesus's resurrection in all four gospel accounts?
2. What do the non-canonical stories about Mary and Martha reveal about early Christian views of women?
3. Which medieval woman's story do you find the most interesting and why?
4. How did the insistence on clerical celibacy impact the leadership roles available to women?
5. How are today's efforts to reframe and minimize the role of women in Church History similar to medieval attempts to do the same thing?

## CHAPTER 4

1. How did the cultural shifts of the Reformation era lead to changes in the perception of women?
2. Is being a wife and mother the highest calling for a Christian woman? How do you think the Bible answers this question?
3. What positive examples of Christian women are taught in today's churches that do not directly involve being a wife or mother? How does this compare to positive examples of Christian men?
4. What pressures exist today inside the church for young Christian women as they make decisions about their future?
5. Why hasn't the Protestant emphasis on the priesthood of every believer led to greater opportunities for women to teach and exercise spiritual authority in more Protestant churches?

## CHAPTER 5

1. What is the purpose of using gender-neutral language when it comes to translating the Bible?
2. Why do you think gender-neutral language is controversial when it comes to translating the English Bible?
3. When English translations use masculine pronouns for words that are gender-neutral in the original Greek and Hebrew, how could this affect the way women of faith view themselves? How could this affect the way men of faith view women?
4. Read 1 Timothy 3. Now reread it as it appears in the original Greek, removing occurrences of the word "man," changing "he" to "they," , changing the word "wife" to "woman," and changing the word "servant" to "deacon." If this is how you heard 1 Timothy 3 read your entire life, how might your views of men and women in church leadership be different?
5. As you have seen in this chapter, it is impossible to translate the Bible from one language to another without doing some interpretation to decide which English words should be used. Aside from becoming a scholar of Greek and Hebrew, what are some ways an English reader of the Bible can avoid being unconsciously influenced by these human interpretations of the text?

## CHAPTER 6

1. In what ways are Christian girls and women made to feel responsible for the inappropriate sexual behavior and attitudes of boys and men?
2. In evangelical churches, it is common for husbands to be encouraged to work outside the home to earn money while wives, especially those with children, are encouraged to stay home and take care of responsibilities there. What passages in Scripture are used to support this understanding of the responsibilities of men and women?
3. Read Proverbs 31:10–31. What activities does this woman engage in that do not fit neatly within the “cult of domesticity?”
4. How can we appreciate and celebrate the differences between men and women without lapsing into constricting rules and structures?
5. What traits and activities of women did Jesus recognize and encourage?
6. Why do you think prominent Christian women tend to introduce themselves in relation to their families first, while Christian men do not? What message does this send?

## CHAPTER 7

1. What evidence is there that complementarian theology is a restoration of certain cultural norms rather than a restoration of theological orthodoxy?
2. What character traits are thought to exemplify a godly woman today? How would this compare to biblical women like Deborah, Jael, Tamar, or Abigail?
3. What does Barr mean by “inerrancy creates an atmosphere of fear?” How does this relate to the roles of women?
4. Complementarian theology teaches that women are spiritually equal to men but simply have different roles. Do you think it is possible to restrict one group of people from leadership roles and still view them as equals? What are the historical precedents for this?
5. With both Jesus in relation to the father and women in relation to men, complementarians teach that there is a hierarchy where one is eternally subordinate to the other. In a situation where sin is not present (for example, in the Trinity, or in humans both before the Fall and in a glorified state), what need is there for a hierarchy?

## CHAPTER 8

1. Barr quotes Kate Bowler, who says “evangelical girls learn about the limits of their own spiritual authority as an accounting of small details, little moments of encouragement or discouragement . . .” (p. 202). Do you agree with this? If so, what has been your experience? How has it affected you?
2. In Matthew 7 Jesus, while speaking of the Pharisees, states that we can recognize false prophets by their fruit. What are the fruits of complementarianism in the lives of women?
3. Within a complementarian theological framework, what recourse does a woman have if men in authority over her abuse their power? How has this played out in evangelical circles?
4. Since the same passages (from Paul) that are used to emphasize women’s uniquely submissive role to men also speak of slaves staying submissive to their masters, how can we say the Bible clearly teaches the submission of women while denying that the Bible upholds slavery and racism?
5. If complementarian theology is the result of a desire to take Scripture seriously, why does it seem so different from the approaches of Jesus and Paul, which elevated women’s status in the Christian community?