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Six, Gender and the Bible – THE 313

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Book Summary: The Making of Biblical Womanhood-How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth. Percentage read -100%

In the book entitled “The Making of Biblical Womanhood-How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth” Beth Allison Barr explore and analyzes Church history and theology to reveal theological misinterpretation as presented by evangelical complementarians. Barr is convinced that complementarian theology is based on handful of verses read apart from their historic context and that cultural assumptions and practices regarding womanhood are read into the Biblical text, rather than the Biblical text being read within its own historical and cultural context. Barr stressed that textual and historic evidence counters the complementarian model of Biblical womanhood and the theology behind it. The book is organized into eight section and each section gives evidence as to why subjugation of women has nothing to do with gospel truth. Barr begins with what patriarchy is all about, (historic continuity of Christian Patriarchy and the historic truth about Patriarchy), why Biblical Womanhood doesn’t come from Paul, evidence from Medieval history (Historic memory about female leadership empowered later women like Margery Kempe to preach, teach and lead), the cost of the reformation for Evangelical women, (while Reformation could have affirmed women’s spiritual equality with men, it instead ushered in a renewed patriarchalism that placed married firmly under the headship of their husbands), Writing women out of English Bible (Bible translation like ESV was born to secure readings of Scripture that preserve male headship and to fight against feminism and secular culture challenging the Word of God), sanctifying subordination (The use of piety, domesticity, submission and purity as characteristics of the ideal Christian woman), Making Biblical truth gospel truth, (Making women’s subordination central to the gospel of Christ) and concluded by

asking the question “isn’t it time to set women free? The book is written to liberate women from harmful patriarchal hierarchies and to heal the pain inflicted by countless Churches who think women are divinely created helpers and men are divinely created leaders and have refuse to allow women to use their God-given gifts to preach, teach, prophesy, and perform other ministerial duties in the church

Barr uses her life experiences or exposure as pastor’s wife, her training as a historian whose research focuses on women in medieval and early modern Church history, her knowledge and understanding of biblical text and historical evidence to critique complementarian systems. For instance, Barr does well by emphasizing that women are portrayed throughout the Bible and not just in a few selected Pauline text. Barr uses Medieval history to challenge complementarian teachings about women role in churches. Barr noted that “Margery Kempe used the Word of God to defend her right as a woman to teach about God. She preached from the Bible to a room full of male priest, including archbishop of York, defending her write to do so as a woman. She could teach the Word of God, even as an ordinary woman, because she argued, Jesus endorsed it. She taught the archbishop of York theological truth and when confronted with Scripture that demanded her silence as a woman, she explained how that Scripture did not apply to her. (Barr 74-75). According to Barr “Evidence shows that Christian patriarchy was built stone by stone throughout centuries and centuries after centuries arguments for women subordination reflect historic circumstances more than the face of God. (Barr 205). I strongly agree with Barr that “When the Church denies women the ability to preach, lead, teach and sometimes even work outside the home, the church is continuing a long historic tradition of subordinating women.” (Barr 20). I do not think women work outside the home is less important than men because they

are all created in the image of God in managing or taking care of God's creation or the household of God, either family or the Church.

I think Barr argument that "Complementarian theology claims it is defending a plain and natural interpretation of the Bible, while really defending an interpretation that has been corrupted by sinful human drive to dominate others and build hierarchies of power and oppression." (Barr 7) is not convincing because I think that equality coexists with divinely mandated leadership and submission, just as it does in the family, and this does not always lead to abuse, offense, or exploitation for all of us are essential and equally important in our position and function within the body of Christ. Paul words are contextualized both theologically and historically, they are read differently. Barr noted that Hierarchy gives birth to patriarchy and patriarchy gives birth to the abuse of both sex and power. The same Biblical passages used to declare Black people unequal are used to declare women unfit for leadership. Patriarchy and racism are interlocking structures of oppression". (Barr 207, 208). I do not agree with Barr because I think male domination is a personal moral failure and not a biblical doctrine. Male-female equality does not constitute undifferentiated sameness. Again, Barr argued that Paul's calling to service is not restricted along gender lines so that argument about complementarians find no grounding here. (Barr 63). I think Paul never limited women's leadership because throughout his letter it is seen that women led in the early Church and that he supports their ministries. But distinction between male and female is a distinction that arise out of creation and is maintained in family and Church life in the New Testament and that role differences in the Church and home does not destroy our equality in Christ. I think that it is men's primary responsibility to lead in a God-glorifying direction and not in a domineering way even though women are also called to lead in the Church and home but it is women primary responsibility to manage the home.

Barr uses autobiographical approach with exemplary textual and historical evidence to challenge the patriarchy and complementarianism view (women are divinely created helpers and men are divinely created leaders) which is considered as the gospel truth. Barr aim is to change the system promoted by complementarians. She resolved not to be silent about the system because it is not the gospel truth. The system oppresses women and stands contrary to everything Jesus did and taught and Christians who remain silent allow both misogyny and abuse to run rampant in the Church and society. Women leaders and teachers have been left out of history by complementarians, but Barr uses historical examples from medieval period to prove otherwise. I think that Barr did a great job by emphasizing that “there is no logical or theological reason to prohibit women’s ordination.” (Barr 213). I think careful examination of the Scriptures will show that women have played a vital role in ministry. Women have contributed to the spread of God’s kingdom message. No woman who has a desire to please God should feel that there is no place for her ministry in the Church. I think Barr went on extreme to say that complementarianism is patriarchy, and patriarchy is about power. The book is written to build and strengthen the faith of contemporary Churches to value women role in the Church by echoing that “there is neither male nor female for human beings are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28b). Both men and women are equally important in the eyes of God and must be treated with dignity and respect and allow to function fully with their God-given gifts and talent.

Reference

Barr, Beth Allison. "Making of Biblical Woman-How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth". Grand Rapids. Brazos Press, 2021.