



Beth Allison Barr: [\(00:03\)](#)

And so, realize that our priority is with the good news of the gospel, it's not with upholding the historical circumstances of our culture.

Speaker 2: [\(00:17\)](#)

You're listening to the Faith and Work podcast where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor and society through our daily work.

Joanna Meyer: [\(00:25\)](#)

Hi, I'm Joanna Meyer and welcome to the Faith and Work podcast. I wear a lot of hats here at the institute, from directing events and coaching interns to hosting this podcast, but one of the roles I'm most passionate about is leading our programming around women and work. If you haven't had a chance to attend our annual event, Women, Work and Calling which we'll host this October, you're missing out on a unique and powerful way to learn how God is shaping the world through women's giftedness.

Joanna Meyer: [\(00:54\)](#)

Our guest today, historian and scholar Beth Allison Barr has emerged as one of the most thought provoking voices on this topic through her book, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*. In it, she addresses a topic many women face, how the Christian faith informs gender roles, especially how women integrate their callings and influence in the world. Her book invites readers to think more deeply about where their perspectives about gender come from, specifically the more conservative perspective referred to as biblical womanhood.

Joanna Meyer: [\(01:25\)](#)

You may not agree with everything that Professor Barr says but I anticipate you will find her insight challenging and new. I continue to wrestle with the concept shared in her book. Before the good professor joins us, a bit more about Beth Allison Barr. She's associate professor of history and associate dean of the graduate school at Baylor University in Waco, Texas where she specializes in medieval history, women's history and church history. She is the president of the Conference on Faith and History and is a member of Christians for Biblical Equality. Professor Barr has written for *Christianity Today*, *The Washington Post* and *Religion News Service*. Welcome to the podcast, Beth. It's a privilege to have you here.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(02:06\)](#)

Oh, thank you for inviting me.

Joanna Meyer: [\(02:08\)](#)

Before I hit record, we were talking about what a whirlwind the last year has been. Did you have any idea that your book would just have such an impact in evangelical circles?



Beth Allison Barr: [\(02:20\)](#)

Hmm, okay. So, maybe honest about this. I hoped that it would, but I had no idea how quickly it would take off. If I really thought about it, my thought was that it would be a slow burner, that people would start reading it and it would start, maybe, making the rounds and would have longevity but I had no idea it would take off as quickly as it did. So, I hoped but my hope wasn't what had happened. I didn't mean for it to take off so quickly, et cetera, so this has been a complete surprise.

Joanna Meyer: [\(02:53\)](#)

Yeah, it's been a delight to watch your influence grow. For listeners that may not be familiar with your work, tell us a little bit about your professional journey and what were the circumstances that led to writing *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*?

Beth Allison Barr: [\(03:06\)](#)

Yes. Well, I tell people that this really is, in some ways, the story of my life. I did not intend to write the book, it is not something that I pre planned, it was not premeditated but it really encapsulates the journey that God has had me on. And throughout my whole life, my calling to be a professor and to be an academic has gone alongside my calling to ministry with my husband who has been a pastor for our 25 years of marriage. He started seminary 10 days after we got married and I started the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(03:47\)](#)

So, our journey and academia has walked alongside this journey in ministry from the very beginning. And so, I grew up Southern Baptist, I grew up with this understanding of biblical womanhood, that women are called to support their husbands. But at the same time, I did not grow up in a family and my husband did not grow up in a family that, thinking about biblical womanhood, denied women the right to work outside the home. So, really, it didn't have a great deal of impact on my life until I became a pastor's wife.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(04:25\)](#)

And I became a pastor's wife at a time that the Baptist world was becoming increasingly more patriarchal as we see with the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, in which women are to graciously submit to the headship of their husbands and women cannot be senior pastors. So, my understanding of biblical womanhood and my realization that it, not only is not biblical, but that it is also harmful, is something that has slowly grown throughout my life. And it really wasn't until very recently that my husband and I decided we could no longer support complementarianism or biblical womanhood. The idea that God calls women and men to separate but equal roles, I like the way that they try to present that, separate but equal roles in which women are always under the authority of men. And, in 2016, my husband was fired, lots of things happened with it but the triggering circumstance was us pushing to get a woman to



co-teach high school Sunday school. And so, that was the beginning of the making of biblical womanhood.

Joanna Meyer: ([05:42](#))

Yeah, throughout the book, you traced intersection of patriarchal systems in church culture, and I'd like to go back to the beginning. How would you define patriarchy and how has Christianity danced with its influence throughout church history?

Beth Allison Barr: ([05:56](#))

Wow, that's such a good question. When I thought about writing the book, I thought about my students at Baylor who are mostly from evangelical backgrounds, many of them are from the Baptist tradition and so, many of them grew up with an incomplete understanding of what patriarchy is and, often, a negative response to patriarchy. They saw patriarchy as associated with liberalism and with liberal feminism that they didn't equate with Christianity. So, often, the first thing I have to do with my students is I have to help them understand what patriarchy is. So, that's how I started off my book, I was trying to help people understand what patriarchy is. And, really simply, patriarchy is a society that promotes male leadership and female submission. That's pretty much what it is. And, in this broad definition, it is something we find in every era of history, we find it in every culture, regardless, and it manifests in different ways which we can see with Christianity.

Beth Allison Barr: ([07:04](#))

But at the end of the day, women are under the authority of men and, because women are under the authority of men and they cannot escape out, these women are often treated as less intelligent, as less capable and even, sometimes, ending up in abusive situations. Because when you teach that one person is always in leadership, then you are implying that that one person is better, has something that the other person cannot have. Especially when that leadership is innate in your body, it's not something that you've earned, it's not anything else, it's something that you are born with. It's the same as racism. Patriarchy and racism are pretty much almost the same structures. They just target different people groups.

Joanna Meyer: ([07:55](#))

Mm-hmm (affirmative). You know, one of the chapters that I found most helpful in the book is the one in which you revisit the Apostle Paul's teaching about gender, specifically looking at the household codes that Paul speaks to in some well-known passages. Things like Ephesians five which people probably have read at weddings, Colossians three, Titus two and First Peter two. And we'll list those passages in our show notes so our readers can look more closely at them. But those have been foundational passages that have been used to define evangelical gender roles. So, I want to unpack that a little bit.

Beth Allison Barr: ([08:29](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([08:29](#))

What are the household codes?

Beth Allison Barr: ([08:32](#))

So, Phyllis Trible calls these texts the texts of terror for women. And I actually was just talking with one of my colleagues who told me that he never realized the impact that Paul had on women until he was talking with some of his female students and he saw their visceral reaction when he brought up Paul. He was like, "These women have been ... it's been used as a weapon against them." And I was like, "That's exactly right. Paul has been weaponized against women." And, it's in several passages throughout the Pauline letters, but the household codes are a significant part of this. And what's interesting about this, and I try to emphasize in the book, is that we just completely missed the point of the household codes because we keep reading them out of context. And the household codes, for those who are unfamiliar, you listed the five primary places that they are in scripture, they are a guide for the structure of the household, for the orderly governance of the household.

Beth Allison Barr: ([09:35](#))

This guy that we see in the New Testament is very similar to, in the Greco-Roman world, we have a lot of writers that had similar household codes like this. I quote Aristotle, he was a very famous one, but lots and lots of variations of this household code. And the Christian household codes emphasize the relationship between husband and wives, the relationship between children and their parents and the relationship between slaves and masters. And just what I said they're actually demarcates the difference in the Christian household codes versus the Greco-Roman household codes because the Greco-Roman household codes are not a conversation, they are instructions given to men, written by men, telling men how they need to order their households. And so, the women and the children and the slaves are not part of the conversation.

Beth Allison Barr: ([10:36](#))

The Christian household codes however don't ... I love the way Lucy [Pepe 00:10:41] puts it. I think Scott McKnight says this too, it's not grounded in male authority. The household codes in the New Testament are grounded in relationships and, not only grounded in relationships, but they're delivered to everyone. They talk to the women, they talk to the children, they talk to the slaves. And, if you know anything about Greco-Roman culture, this is actually really surprising. And so, on the one hand, when we hear the household codes, what we hear is wives submit to your husbands.

Beth Allison Barr: ([11:19](#))

But what the Greco-Roman audience would have heard is, first of all, "Oh, my gosh, they're talking to women," which was already very surprising. And, not only are they talking to women, but when they say wives submit to your husbands in Ephesians, that was prefaced by submit to one another as to the Lord. And so, we already see this huge difference where women are not just being called to be under male



authority, but women are being included in the conversation and they are being told, in front of their husbands, that while they submit, their husbands submit too.

Beth Allison Barr: ([11:55](#))

And then, of course, husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loves the church. If we think about how does Christ love the church, Christ died for the church. And I find this really, when I teach about it, the Roman patriarchy, the Roman household leader, patriarch, he had the ability to essentially kill anybody in his household, it was legally acceptable. Now, they mostly didn't do it but it was legally acceptable. They had the power of life and death over their household. And yet, what we see in the New Testament household codes is Paul turns this around and he says, "Legally, you may have the power of life and death over your wife, but God calls you to give your life up for her." So, it's a completely different perspective that we miss. So, I'm talking so much so I'll pause there and let you-

Joanna Meyer: ([12:59](#))

No, that's all right. You're our guest, [inaudible 00:13:01] quote from the book that I found intriguing. You said when read rightly, the household codes not only set women free, but they set all the members of the household free from the oppressive elements of the Roman world. Paul wasn't imposing Roman hierarchy on Christians, Paul was using a Jesus remix to tell Christians how the gospel set them free.

Beth Allison Barr: ([13:23](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([13:23](#))

It just causes me to revisit those verses and think about them in a new light.

Beth Allison Barr: ([13:30](#))

Yeah, I know and-

Joanna Meyer: ([13:30](#))

And as I think of that ... Oh, go ahead.

Beth Allison Barr: ([13:32](#))

Oh, no, I was just going to say, that word remix, I was quoting Rachel Held Evans with that which I know a lot of people in the evangelical world don't respond as well to Rachel Held Evans. But I just always admire her courage for calling this out so early on because she was right about this and she was one of the first people that got evangelicals to start paying attention to how these household codes are a call for Christians to really be different from the world which means to not submit to patriarchy.

Joanna Meyer: ([14:06](#))

Yeah.



Beth Allison Barr: ([14:07](#))

So, I just really love that word.

Joanna Meyer: ([14:10](#))

As we think about women's callings, both their relational callings, often what we refer to as their private callings, and then their discipleship for public life, using their gifts in the world, what insight do Paul's writings offer for women's public lives?

Beth Allison Barr: ([14:25](#))

Gosh, I love this. So, as a woman's historian, in some ways we talk about the dual spheres of women that they have, the private world and the public sphere and that women are called to the private sphere and men are called to the public sphere, which is something we talk about a lot in the early modern world. But what I love about Paul, and I think we miss this because when we look at Paul, we often focus on these texts of terror that seem to emphasize female subordination. But if we step back and look at the overarching story of Paul, one of the things that we see is Paul pulls a lot of women into the letters.

Beth Allison Barr: ([15:06](#))

We know that women were a very important part of Paul's ministry, he names many of these women and he tells them and he names them, he says what good work they are doing, how important they are to him. And what is really interesting about these women is very few of them are associated with their husbands and they aren't also named as mothers. I think about that Twitter what we are, Twitter descriptions, where we say we're a wife and a mom, et cetera, you don't see that in the women in the New Testament, they're not actually identifying themselves by their married relationships.

Beth Allison Barr: ([15:49](#))

And so, think about Phoebe, all we know about Phoebe is that she is the only named deacon in the Bible. We have her name and we don't really know that much else about her except for she's wealthy and she's learned, and Paul values her so much that he entrusts her with the most important theological texts he writes, which is Romans, and sends her back to the most important church site in the Roman Empire at the time, which was Rome. And so, the people in Rome first heard Romans preached to them through Phoebe who, as the carrier of the letter, was also the reader of the letter. So, Paul only identifies Phoebe by her vocational calling, he does not identify her in her married relationship. And that doesn't mean that married relationships aren't important to women but I think what Paul is doing is Paul is using Phoebe as she is called and letting her calling, letting her do what God has called her to do. And so, I think that's really beautiful about Paul.

Joanna Meyer: ([17:08](#))

As a former history major, I love how you stop at critical moments in Christian history during the book to look a little more closely at gender roles. And it was particularly helpful for me because I've been taught,



as many people have, that perspective of gender roles has been unchanging since the foundation of biblical times and it's passed down to us today. And you say, "No, it's not quite the case. As we dig into moments of Christian history, we see a much broader mix of the ways that women were offering their gifts to the world." And so, I wanted to drop down at a few of those times. I'm just going to ask our audience to indulge me, I actually think a better knowledge of church history is critical to a better understanding of our faith. So, listeners, this is why I'm-

Beth Allison Barr: ([17:47](#))

So do I.

Joanna Meyer: ([17:48](#))

... [crosstalk 00:17:48] to do that. Yeah. So, let's talk a little bit about medieval history. And for those of us that weren't history majors, what time period are you referring to and what role did Christian women play in the medieval church in early modern history?

Beth Allison Barr: ([18:01](#))

Right. No, that's a great question. So, periodization, just very roughly, when we think about the early church, what we're mostly thinking about is the first century through the fourth or fifth century. And then, when we think about the beginning of the medieval church, we think about the fourth or fifth century, really, through 1500 and 1500, of course, is you can set the somewhat, I don't want to say arbitrary or artificial, but the most well-known date is 1517 with Martin Luther. So, when we think about the medieval church, roughly, that 1,000-year period between 500 and 1500 is what we're talking about.

Beth Allison Barr: ([18:36](#))

And it is the period of history that, I think, evangelicals know the least about. I always joke that, often, our textbooks, they end with Augustine in the fourth century and they pick up again with Martin Luther in the 16th century. We might get Thomas Aquinas there in the middle or something, but not very much. So, we have these 1,000 years of God using people and people sharing the gospel and living out their callings that we just don't talk about and don't know very much about.

Beth Allison Barr: ([19:11](#))

So, I was trying to help people not only see what is going on during that time period, but also to show how ideas about women have not remained constant. So, for example, in the medieval world, while it is true, especially as we get past the 13th century, the 12th and 13th century, it is true that women can't be ordained as priests. And so, some people say, "Well, women can't be priests in the past, women can't be pastors in the future," same thing, right? Well, no, there's actually a significant difference.

Beth Allison Barr: ([19:48](#))

The reason women couldn't be priests in the medieval church was because they believe something was wrong with their bodies, that their bodies were flawed. And so, there was something physically wrong



that made women inferior to men. And so, the flip side of that though is that women, through God's power, could overcome the weaknesses of their body and lead like men. So, we get these women who appear relatively frequently throughout the medieval world who are leading and having the authority of men.

Beth Allison Barr: ([20:24](#))

A very famous example of this is Hildegard of Bingen who has gotten more popular lately because she actually wrote 70 songs. I've seen it all over the internet, you can go look her up and it's funny what people have done with her music. So, she was this really, really talented, talented woman. And not only though, she was a visionary, a mystic, she was in a Benedictine monastery that was a double house, which meant it had both women and men in it, but she attracted many more women to her than the men did. If we put it in modern terms, she had a much larger platform than the Benedictine monks in her house. And so, she got so big that she had to go and start her own monastery and they were actually a little upset about that because she took all of this wealth and all of these people with her but she started her own monastery.

Beth Allison Barr: ([21:21](#))

But she also became what some scholars have called the Dear Abby of the central middle ages where important men from all over Europe would write to her and ask advice. And she also went on preaching tours where she preached to bishops, archbishops, even the Pope would reach out to her for advice. And so, what we clearly see with Hildegard is that she was wielding the authority, if we put it in modern terms, of a senior pastor or a denominational leader and men accepted her authority in a way that, now, in modern evangelicalism, we would argue women cannot do.

Jeff Haanen: ([22:10](#))

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Joanna Meyer: ([22:55](#))

As I was reading, the names of the women whose stories you tell just caught my eye. I think of women like Margery Kempe, Clotilda, who was a Burgundian princess, Genevieve of Paris, Bridget of Kildare, you mentioned Hildegard, Catherine of Siena. And as I was listening, the chorus of an old Destiny's Child song, Say My Name, came to mind. The song is about a girl that's on the phone with her cheating



boyfriend and she wants him to acknowledge her in front of the girl that he's cheating on her with. But all of a sudden, the chorus, say my name became say their names.

Beth Allison Barr: ([23:34](#))

Yes.

Joanna Meyer: ([23:34](#))

And I just kept going over in my head because I thought, "Here are women who've played a significant role in building the faith and we don't even know who they are." Would you tell us one more story of a medieval woman whose name we should remember?

Beth Allison Barr: ([23:45](#))

I actually love that. That should be the title of something, say their names. Of course, it also was associated with Black Lives Matter but, still, this idea that the reason we don't know these stories about women is because we don't tell them because we write them out. So, yeah, so there are all sorts. Hildegard, of course, is one that I just told you, but Clotilda is actually a great story. Clotilda is the wife of the king of the Franks, his name is Clovis, some people might recognize his name. But Clovis does something really remarkable in the early medieval world and he converts to Christianity. He is one of these barbarian Goths who is been rampaging, that's not exactly but that's often the narrative that we're taught, been rampaging and destroying what's leftover of the Roman Empire. And he marries Clotilda who is this Burgundian princess and she's Christian, and he marries her and she continuously tries to get him to convert for Christianity.

Beth Allison Barr: ([25:01](#))

And she does something which we wouldn't really think all that much about, but when she has a child, she tells him that she wants him baptized, the child baptized. And, of course, they did infant baptism then and they baptized the child and the child dies and Clovis is really unhappy with her about this and it happens again. She does it again and, this time, he essentially tells her that if the child dies, that this is not going to go well for her. But she continues to share her faith with him and, eventually, Clovis actually gives in and there's this really powerful moment where he prays to God and he says, "If You are real, then show me," and he wins this major battle which he interprets as God being on his side.

Beth Allison Barr: ([25:54](#))

And so, he publicly converts to Christianity with all of his soldiers and this is essentially the beginning of Christianity taking a stronghold in Western Europe and it's because of a woman that it happens. So, this is a very common narrative in the medieval world. It's that women are the primary evangelists who bring Christianity and convert, not just their husbands, but essentially men all over the place. So, anyway, the first missionaries really were women.



Joanna Meyer: ([26:31](#))

So fascinating and interesting to see Clotilda using her relational calling of marriage to [crosstalk 00:26:37]

Beth Allison Barr: ([26:37](#))

Yes, yes.

Joanna Meyer: ([26:38](#))

So, we see-

Beth Allison Barr: ([26:39](#))

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([26:39](#))

... the opportunities integration of those various callings. Let's fast forward to the Reformation and I want you to imagine Joanna Meyer sitting as a 12th grader at Cherry Creek High School outside of Denver, just a few miles from where I'm recording today. And, for the first time in my life, I was learning about the Protestant Reformation. Me, a little Protestant pastor's kid, had never heard about it. I'm in a public school classroom and for the first time, probably, I'm hearing my faith described in a positive way. It was amazing, the priest is a believer, it's the-

Beth Allison Barr: ([27:08](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([27:09](#))

... [inaudible 00:27:09] Bible and the spread of literacy and all kinds of things. I was just amazed and it put in place just a passion for church history. But it took a little while for me to understand that, for all of the beauty and freedom that the Reformation brought, it also has mixed elements to it too like any point of the human experience, it's never all black and white. But over time, I've realized that it hasn't always been the best for women. You really talk about that in your book about how the Reformation introduced some themes that continue to have a weight in women's lives today, I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about that.

Beth Allison Barr: ([27:41](#))

Yeah, sure. So, I tell people that the two hardest chapters for me to write were the Paul chapter and the Reformation chapter. The Paul chapter was hard because I didn't want to write it to begin with because I felt like that's where the conversation had mired down and I wanted to show history. My husband convinced me otherwise and so I wrote the Paul chapter. The Reformation chapter was the hardest for me to write because this is my area of research and I know all of the historical arguments behind the



Reformation chapter. A lot of my friends are reformation scholars and so they were in my head the whole time I was writing this chapter, so I was trying to bring together these different arguments.

Beth Allison Barr: ([28:28](#))

And so, the Reformation did a lot of good things and, of course, I'm a Protestant, I'm still Baptist and so I am still very grateful for what the Reformation did. But at the same time, as the western world became more Protestant, the western world was also changing economically and socially. And what we call, as women's historians, we call there was a hardening of patriarchy where we begin to see the rise of the nation state and, as we see monarchs centralizing their power, we also see them beginning to centralize law codes. And as towns began to become more centralized in their governments, we began to see law codes hardening, we also began to see laws changing about marriage and all of these things begin to define women, legally, as being under the authority of their husbands.

Beth Allison Barr: ([29:37](#))

We also find, with reformation theology, that the marriage relationship is put on a pedestal. In the medieval world, being married was what most women did but it wasn't the highest spiritual calling for women. The highest spiritual calling for women was, actually, to remain unmarried or, after your husband died, to remain a widow and to dedicate yourself to the service of God, that was the highest calling. And if you think about Paul, this is exactly what Paul says in First Corinthians. He says it's better for you to remain unmarried and, if you can't control yourself, then it's better to marry than burn is what he says.

Beth Allison Barr: ([30:20](#))

And so, in some ways, the medieval world encapsulated that, but after the Reformation, the emphasis was now on the married relationship. And this is not just theology, this is also a change in the economic and social structures of the medieval world, I mean, of the early modern world and we even begin to see monarchs doing things like the government says that the success of the family mirrors the success of the state. And so, if you have healthy families, then that means you have a healthy country.

Beth Allison Barr: ([30:55](#))

And this is something, too. We still hear this ideology today. And so, what we find happening to women in the Reformation is that their primary calling shifted to be that as a wife and mother, and not only was this their primary calling for their culture, but it became the highest calling for them as godly women. So, to be a godly woman was to be a wife and a mother under the authority of their husbands and this was a significant shift.

Joanna Meyer: ([31:25](#))

Let's talk a little bit about women who brewed beer.



Beth Allison Barr: [\(31:30\)](#)

Yeah, it was fun.

Joanna Meyer: [\(31:31\)](#)

Colorado was a beer drinking state, but pre-Reformation, the occupation of ale wife was common and important. Women were engaged in economic productivity, probably one of many cottage industries that came out of homes. They were working, it might have been home based but they were engaged in economic productivity and that's something that shifted with economic and technological changes. Can you tell us a little bit more about how that change affected women in work?

Beth Allison Barr: [\(31:57\)](#)

Yes, I love to talk about women's work. And I have to tell, a funny thing is that The Making of Biblical Womanhood has inspired a beer. And so, there is actually a brewery in Austin that has made a beer in honor of The Making of Biblical Womanhood, you can go buy it. It's called the Biblical Womanhood Beer, anyway, and it's lovely. I also inspired undergraduate students once, my husband always jokes about this. I have a lecture on beer when I teach medieval history and the point is to talk about work and changing circumstances of work and I would give recipes for medieval beer. And one day, I had some students who took my recipes and they made beer in their bathtub and brought me some.

Joanna Meyer: [\(32:47\)](#)

Was it any good?

Beth Allison Barr: [\(32:48\)](#)

Oh, I did not taste it. I was so glad that they were so inspired but it was really funny. So, my husband said it was a step up when an actual brewery made beer in my name instead of it being made in college boys' bathtubs. So, anyway, there we are but that's as aside. So, women in work. Women have always worked and women have always worked for the economic good of their households. This is something that I think we don't hear enough in 20, 21st century US. We have this idea that the highest calling for a woman is to be a stay-at-home mom who doesn't work.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(33:27\)](#)

Now, I'm not saying you can't do that, as I said, my general narrative is people should do what God has called them to do, whether that be home, work, whatever. So, that's my general [inaudible 00:33:37], but the idea that women can stay home and not work outside the home is a very modern concept, it is also a concept that is class based. It's mostly only wealthier, White women who have been able to afford this, so we always have to think about that.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(33:56\)](#)

Now, at the same time though, it is true that women's work often was based from the household, stemmed from their household duties and so it was often associated with the home. So, in the medieval



world, we see a lot of women who are sellers of foodstuff and who have businesses that are related to clothing and sewing and then making beer. They would make beer for their household and they would sell the extra to their neighbors. And some women became really good at this where that was really where they made most of their money for their household. Some women were so good at it that they got special status to not have to be economically tied to their husband, they were called feme soles and they could be business women by themselves. And so, in the medieval world, we have a lot of these feme soles who are able to separate their business from their husbands.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(34:52\)](#)

And we actually see this with Margery Kempe who I talk about in the book. We don't know if she's a feme sole but she has the money in the household, her husband has to ask her for money. And she has a lot of these but, yeah, it's actually really funny. It's how she buys him out of, essentially, she doesn't want to have any more kids and he says that he will have a chaste marriage with her if she pays off all his debts and so that's how they have this. But what we see happening as we move into the early modern world is, because of the changing nature of business and jobs, we see a lot of these household occupations moving outside the home and becoming more male dominated.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(35:35\)](#)

And in the book I talk about, and this was actually inspired by the historian Judith Bennett, I have to give her credit, she's the one. Women still brewed really good ale but they couldn't keep up with the deep pockets of the men who had more economic resources and had more ability to travel and sell their products further. And so, women, essentially, they're like your small local business who loses out to Starbucks and that's what we see happening to women as ale-wise, is they lose out to Starbucks.

Joanna Meyer: [\(36:12\)](#)

We have a beer aficionado on our staff, Brian Gray, who often talks about the balance of craft brewing versus the major industrial producer. So, even back then, we're starting to see that. And let's talk about the Industrial Revolution and how industrialization changed women's lives because that, I think, is one of the most profound theological changes of the Reformation and then the technical changes and the spiritualization that came out of it, of the industrialization is huge. So, tell us a little bit about it. What changes are we seeing during that time period? And for reference, that's 17 and 1800s, England and Northern Europe. What changes to see and how do they echo some of the teaching about women's roles today?

Beth Allison Barr: [\(36:52\)](#)

Right. So, what we see happening in the Industrial Revolution is we see these really fast-paced technological changes in which we see factories beginning to be bounded machines. This is also when we got in, I'm in Texas, so the cotton gin. I tell a story to my students when I take them on local history walks about how the guy in Waco with the cotton gin smuggled it in through Mexico and that was really when Waco started becoming prosperous with cotton because they had the cotton gin now. So,



machines made it possible for work to be much more efficient and for products to be shipped and sold, so people made a lot more money.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(37:37\)](#)

The problem, though, is that ordinary people can't buy a machine and have it in their house and so machines become outside the home. And for the, really, I don't want to say first time in history because I can always think of the nuances here, but what we see happening is we see that work is beginning to move almost completely outside the home, becomes divorced from the domestic space. And this creates a problem that people haven't had to face as much, at least on this large scale. And what do you do with the children back home when work moves outside the home? We don't have public schools, what do you do with the kids? Seriously, what do you [crosstalk 00:38:25]?

Joanna Meyer: [\(38:25\)](#)

That's happening today in the pandemic times. How in the world [crosstalk 00:38:29]?

Beth Allison Barr: [\(38:28\)](#)

Yes, yeah.

Joanna Meyer: [\(38:30\)](#)

Home responsibilities of parenting and careers? It's still an ongoing question but, anyway, I'm interrupting you.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(38:35\)](#)

No, no, no, that's perfect. That's a perfect parallel. What we see actually happening now is the reverse where we see work moving back into the home because of remote and people not wanting to give it up. I was reading the story about Wall Street where they can't convince people to come back to the office, and so the banks are happy to let them just stay home because they just want to stay home and work. So, the Industrial Revolution is the opposite of what we see happening during the pandemic with the same problem, what do you do with the kids?

Beth Allison Barr: [\(39:03\)](#)

And so, what we begin to see is, on the one hand, the Industrial Revolution starts hiring a lot of women because they need cheap labor. But at the same time, they also need women to take care of children at home. So, the compromise that they come up with is just really horrific. It's we'll hire a lot of women but we'll pay them less than men to discourage them from working outside the home. So, what you end up with is a whole lot of underpaid women who are working in these factories, trying to support their families but not getting paid wages at the same rate as men.



Beth Allison Barr: [\(39:41\)](#)

And then, also, having the dual responsibility of trying to figure out what to do with their kids while they're in the work and a lot of these kids start going to work in the factories with their moms, this is where we get the child labor. So, we begin to see a great disparity. Although there's always been disparity between what when women and men are paid, we begin to see this gap open even more where we see men moving into the leadership positions in these factory work, whereas women are on the lowest rung of the ladder and just being paid to do the menial stuff and getting the lowest wages, not just because they're doing the lowest rung of work, but also because they want to discourage women from working. So, it's really horrific circumstances for women.

Joanna Meyer: [\(40:29\)](#)

Yeah, and my impression is that, during this time period, we see the ability to stay home and care for kids as a bit of a status symbol, like it was a mark of prestige-

Beth Allison Barr: [\(40:36\)](#)

Yes.

Joanna Meyer: [\(40:37\)](#)

... and it reflected a certain value on the home. I wonder if you could tell us more about the cult of domesticity as it's called.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(40:42\)](#)

Yeah, that's really a 19th century phenomenon and it is very much a class based phenomenon. And it is, as you said, it's this idea that women and ... Part of its born in the Enlightenment and the Enlightenment is also a part of what's going on with the Industrial Revolution and it also is born in scientific changes. Science takes leaps and bounds during this time, including medicine, people are much more familiar with what happens to the human body, people actually start cutting the body open and seeing how it works. And one of the arguments that they begin to have is that women's bodies are so different from men that women are created to do distinctly different roles from men.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(41:33\)](#)

So, essentially, because women's bodies, they argued, were smaller than men and because women's bodies were made for child rearing, they argued that women's brains were also smaller than men's which they argued meant that they were less intelligent, this is same thing they make about race. And so, they argue that women are less intelligent and their bodies are geared towards bearing children, which means that the ideal role for women is to stay in the home and rear children.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(42:06\)](#)

We also have a shift in how women's morality is regarded. I talk about this in the book, it was funny for me as a medievalist. In the medieval world, women, in the tradition of Eve, were seen as the more sinful



ones, the ones that tempt men. This is not good for women but it's different. Whereas we see in the early modern world, they're the models of virtue, they're the pure ones who don't have sexually corrupt thoughts and it's men who then become the ones that tempt women and that cause women the fallen woman.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(42:46\)](#)

And so, we begin to see this idea that women, not only are less intelligent than men, made to be in the home, but they also need to be protected from men, from the sexual appetites of men and so we see a great emphasis on women's clothing. The first purity movement is in the Victorian era, the 19th century, this emphasis on women's clothing. And so, we get the ideal woman is a woman who stays home, bears children and, essentially, only is out in public and doing public things with her husband. So, her identity becomes completely subsumed in that of home, family and husband.

Joanna Meyer: [\(43:36\)](#)

Yeah. Let's fast forward to modern day a little bit. I'd like to know what effects the teachings have had specifically on your work as a professor. Because I know that you see glimmers of it in how students interact with you. Even though Baylor's a, it's private, but it's a more mainstream College, it's a Baptist school so you have religious roots, and so you see elements of this in your teaching. How has it affected or shown up in your work as a professor?

Beth Allison Barr: [\(44:04\)](#)

So, when I first wrote *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, right before it came out, the very first public writing I did for it was published in the Dallas Morning News and it gave a preview of the book and I wrote a narrative that went along with it. And I was reached out to by so many female professors after that point, it was amazing. My colleagues at Baylor, people all over the place and they said, "I have always felt," as a woman working as a professor in evangelical world, especially at Christian colleges and universities, they said, "I have always felt this tension between my male colleagues and male students who believe that women should not be in leadership, yet here I am in leadership in the classroom and in the university."

Beth Allison Barr: [\(45:06\)](#)

And they begin telling me their experiences and their experiences match a lot of experiences that I have had. In fact, I tell the story of one in the classroom where I had a very vocal conservative student who openly challenged my authority in the classroom because I was a woman and because, from his perspective, should be under the authority of my husband. And what I found is that my story about that is a common story for women in the academic profession. And I, being a youth minister's wife for a very long time, I remember thinking about this once when we were in our youth group room.



Beth Allison Barr: [\(45:52\)](#)

And I was seeing all of those teenage boys and teenage girls sitting next to each other and it occurred to me that when we teach those teenage boys that there is something about their bodies that makes them able to teach, and women, because of who they are cannot teach, we're teaching those teenage boys that there's something that makes them innately above those teenage girls. And that is a dangerous narrative and it manifests in the working lives of evangelical women.

Joanna Meyer: [\(46:28\)](#)

Yeah, I find in my conversations with women that, often, our focus on personal discipleship and relational calling is so strong that there's very little discipleship for women in public life and I think some of it is that we just haven't pushed into addressing some of these hard questions. When we allow those specific areas of calling and theological perspectives on them to cover all of life, we just end up with this gap, there's a lack of thinking about women's influence in public life.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(46:53\)](#)

Yeah, it's like the Billy Graham rule.

Joanna Meyer: [\(46:55\)](#)

Yeah.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(46:56\)](#)

So, yeah.

Joanna Meyer: [\(46:58\)](#)

We don't talk about this often but some of the principles around biblical manhood and womanhood can have a negative effect on men's lives and I want to hear a little bit more about that. For reference, I think of the conversation we had with our fellows here at Denver Institute about women in work and one of the younger career men came up and said, "Hey, Joanna, I'm really open to this conversation but you'll also need to know, this is really hard for me. It affects areas of identity." Because he said, "All of my training about what it means to be a godly man has emphasized that it's my responsibility to provide for a family. And so, it's not that I'm against women working but I haven't seen this any other way and it makes me rethink my own identity." How have you seen it affect men?

Beth Allison Barr: [\(47:41\)](#)

Gosh, that is so true. That's been the problem with this whole thing and that's why my subtitle of my book is how the subjugation of women became gospel truth, because what women and men have been taught is that our godly calling is not only to live out the Gospel, but to live out the Gospel in these distinctly different gendered paths and that, if we deviate from those paths, that it is damaging to the Gospel. That's essentially this idea. Our whole identity is wrapped up in not just following Christ, but in



following Christ a certain way because we are male or female which is exactly what we're being told. And so, it is. It is very hard for men.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(48:34\)](#)

In fact, I'm very sympathetic to men who have a hard time moving from complementarian positions because this is all they have ever known and their whole identity is wrapped up in it. But at the same time, I know my husband years and years ago when I was still in grad school and he was in one of his first full time pastoral jobs, and one of the people in our church, I can't even remember if it was male or female but they asked him, they said, "Aren't you going to be upset when your wife finally finishes her degree and becomes a professor and makes more money than you?"

Beth Allison Barr: [\(49:13\)](#)

And my husband was like, "I can't wait for my wife to make more money than me," and I remember thinking about that when we tell men that the economic survival of their family is completely dependent upon them as breadwinners, that's a heavy burden to carry. And, when we shame them, I think about Mark Driscoll's sermons that we've all heard so much because of the Rise and Fall of Mars podcast, but where he shames men if their wives are working outside the home, those are terrible burdens to put on men. Especially men who, maybe, really aren't very good leaders and really would rather be in the background, maybe these men who are married to women who are the opposite, who are actually extremely gifted and really good at business and really good at leadership.

Beth Allison Barr: [\(50:15\)](#)

And when you tell these families that, "No, no, the woman can't do that because she's a woman. The man has to do that but he's not really very good at it." And so, they're both doing things that they're not called to do, the pressure on that marriage and you can think about the tension that that causes between those spouses. Really, it's so harmful and it is so unnecessary. And so, anyway, it does a great deal of damage to men.

Joanna Meyer: [\(50:50\)](#)

Yeah, yeah. And I think, in the long run, it limits our ability to serve the Lord, to have a kingdom [inaudible 00:50:58].

Beth Allison Barr: [\(50:58\)](#)

Yes, yes.

Joanna Meyer: [\(50:59\)](#)

This is a question of all play. We want Christians, Christ followers to fully show up with their gifts in every corner of the world. That's the vision of organization-



Beth Allison Barr: ([51:08](#))

Amen.

Joanna Meyer: ([51:08](#))

... of the Denver Institute. We think about the calling-

Beth Allison Barr: ([51:10](#))

Amen.

Joanna Meyer: ([51:10](#))

... of every believer is to have a redemptive influence where we are. And so, if we start narrowly defining on culturally shaped categories of what that area of service influence looks like, we're missing out on the full expression of the gifts of God's people in the world. So, it has deep kingdom importance that we wrestle with these questions.

Beth Allison Barr: ([51:28](#))

Yes.

Joanna Meyer: ([51:29](#))

And so, couple final questions for you as we wrap up.

Beth Allison Barr: ([51:31](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([51:31](#))

One is that I can imagine a few listeners thinking, "Okay, Joanna, you and Professor Barr just took a sharp stick to some of the beliefs that I think are really central to how I was raised." Think about marriage and family and, to a broader extent, women's roles in the world. What counsel would you have for someone who's wrestling with these concepts?

Beth Allison Barr: ([51:49](#))

Yeah. First of all, I'd say it's okay to be uncomfortable. I was uncomfortable for many, many years because that's exactly the way that I was raised and it took me a long time to really think through this. So, I think it's okay to be uncomfortable, I think it's actually great to be uncomfortable. I think if we're always comfortable in what we believe and we always think we're right about what we believe, that's actually a dangerous place to be. So, I think it's okay to be uncomfortable. What I would encourage you to do is to go learn more. Don't take my word for it, don't take your word for it, go read more.



Beth Allison Barr: ([52:28](#))

I gave a whole bibliography in *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* and there's all sorts of other resources. So, go read more, don't just take my word for it. The other thing is to make sure that you separate your faith, your belief in the redemption of Jesus from your historical culture and realize that just because what you think you should do in the world in which you live actually has very little to do with the good news of the gospel. And so, realize that our priority is with the good news of the gospel, it's not with upholding the historical circumstances of our culture.

Joanna Meyer: ([53:20](#))

Yeah, I'd like to give you the final word. We often close the podcast by giving guests a chance to offer a church to our listeners. And so, I'm wondering, based on what we've said, if you would offer a word of encouragement and invitation for our listeners to follow God and love our neighbors more?

Beth Allison Barr: ([53:38](#))

Yes. Actually, I end *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* with a call and it was a call that came to me while I was actually teaching one day where, at the end of my classroom, I always just tell my students ... You can think about it, you have all these undergrads in the classroom, they've been sitting there for an hour and 15 minutes and, by the end, they're fidgety and trying to move around and do stuff. And so, I want them to know that it's okay and that now it's time for them to go and do something else.

Beth Allison Barr: ([54:08](#))

So, I end my class, I'm just like, "Go be free you all, just go be free." And it suddenly occurred to me that that's what I wanted women and men to hear is that we, as people, as humans, we often we try to force each other into roles and we try to force ourselves to be what we think other people will like when, really, all God is calling us to do is to follow and to follow in whatever way God calls us. So, I would just like people to be free, to be who God has called them to be.

Joanna Meyer: ([54:53](#))

We'll let that be the final word, like our prayer that people will feel the freedom in Christ to be who He's made them to be.

Beth Allison Barr: ([54:59](#))

Yes.

Joanna Meyer: ([54:59](#))

Beth Allison Barr, thanks for your time and your insight today.

Beth Allison Barr: ([55:03](#))

Thank you.



Joanna Meyer: ([55:06](#))

What a mind and heart stretching conversation with Beth Allison Barr. This type of conversation is one part of Denver Institute's broader women invocation initiative. If you'd like to learn more about this programming and October's Women, Work and Calling event, check out today's show notes which include a form you can complete to be added to the mailing list for occasional updates. Thanks for listening today and may God strengthen your work and service.

Speaker 2: ([55:34](#))

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