



Book Review

Disciplines of a Godly Woman: Barbara Hughes, Crossway Books (2006)

Disciplines of a Godly Woman deals with a number of issues with which women in the 21st century must, if we are to be honest with God and ourselves, struggle. In reading the book, the reader must be discerning with erroneous teachings in a number of areas, including salvation. That said, valuable biblical principles can still be derived from Barbara Hughes' work.

Much of the book relates to general principles all Christians would do well to consider. The author's main premise is that to live disciplined, godly lives requires the Christian (and in this context, Christian women) to be submissive. It flows through Scripture from beginning to end and we must come to terms with this foundational teaching. It seems countercultural; yet, as Christians, we are called to be countercultural in this current age as were the Christians of the first century.

In dealing with any Scripture, one of the biggest obstacles we strike is where the will of God comes into conflict with our will. We can respond to this in a few ways. We can ignore what the Word teaches in regard to a given subject; we can try and massage the Word to fall into line with what we already believe; or we can submit to what the Word teaches. The obstacle, then, to following God is embracing submission.

'Many Christians have a foggy understanding, thinking submission has something to do with marriage and a woman's relationship with her husband (which it does), or perhaps a woman's role in the church (which it also does). But the call to submission is much more extensive than these narrow applications.'

Submission is yielding to the authority of another. Puritan teacher Jeremiah Burroughs wrote: "to keep under, that is to submit. The soul can submit to God at the time when it can send itself under the power and authority and dominion that God has over it." (p 34)

Barbara Hughes does not tiptoe around the idea of submission as a discipline. She discusses it in relation to all areas of our lives. She considers it in relationship to the Gospel:

'In a day when everything (including theology) is decided by popular opinion, how easy it is to believe another gospel. How easy it is to shape our god according to what we think he should be like and not allow the whole of Scripture to explain him.' (p 23)

And to prayer:

'...few of us capitalize on this opportunity to draw from "home base" the power we need to press on or to have our wills bent to God's.' (p 42)

And to worship:

'Every woman who calls herself a Christian must understand that worship is the ultimate priority in her life. Worship is what God wants from you and me – every day.' (p 62)

Hughes goes on to discuss the renewing of our minds, developing contentment, perseverance and propriety in our behaviour.

There are certainly topics in the book where Hughes does not shy away from the controversial. She tackles submissive frameworks for the church as well as questions on being single, being married and the topic of generosity. She specifically discusses tithing, expressing an important attitude in relation to generosity:

'Giving from a heart overflowing with God's grace, whether the giving be mandatory or voluntary, has always been the ideal for God's people – before and after the coming of Christ. When a heart overflows in the grace of giving, a substantial amount of income goes to God.' (p 202)

As the debate about the role of women in the church rages, we have a responsibility to consider this controversial subject and be prepared to accept what God has to teach us in his Word. Many of the teachings of Christ are controversial when seen through a secular lens. They were in the first century and they are now. Choosing to be ignorant is of no spiritual benefit.

Whether you agree with her conclusions or not, one of the most valuable aspects of this book is the fact that she has the courage to deal with the controversial issues facing women of God. This gives us the opportunity to examine Scripture, wrestle with what is being said and come to some conclusions or at least be prepared to discuss our understanding.

Hughes' overarching philosophy in writing this book, I believe, is in regard to the attitude of the Christian woman and obedience to the Word. She highlights the difference between discipline and legalism, words which are often used interchangeably in postmodern culture. She writes:

'But true discipline is a far cry from legalism – thank God! The difference lies in motivation: Legalism is self centred; discipline is God centred. The legalist heart says, "I will do this thing to gain merit with God." The disciplined heart says "I will do this because I love God and want to please him." The true heart of discipline is relationship – a relationship with God.' (p 14)

When you to read this book, chew over it, discuss it and study it with your Bible open in front of you. Be discerning, but be open to those concepts that are firmly rooted in Scripture.

If nothing else, we can use this book as a springboard to a deeper, more satisfying study regarding the will of God in our lives as women. ■

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