

Transcript 101

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. On today's episode, we're going to be interviewing Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher. The authors of *Jesus and Gender, Living as Brothers and Sisters in Christ*. This has been a very interesting book for me to read and a couple of other staff members read as well and we've got some really good conversations, so Elyse and Eric and welcome to the show.

Elyse Fitzpatrick

Thank you.

Eric Schumacher

Yeah, thanks for having us.

Shea Houdmann

So what led you two to get together and write *Jesus and Gender*? What were some of the things that you've observed in Christendom that led you to believe that this book was something the body of Christ needed to have access to?

Elyse Fitzpatrick

Well, I think that one of the reasons that we wanted to write *Jesus and Gender* was because we wrote, we coauthored, *Worthy*, celebrating the value of women together and celebrating the value of women. We wrote that together and it was kind of the next logical question which was, all right, so if we women have values so what? What does that mean? Why should we care? And we saw enough, I think, and I'll let Eric speak to this if he wants to but we saw, we've seen enough in modern American evangelicalism to tell us that may be the way things are being played out in people's lives, don't demonstrate that we think that women have value or should be celebrated.

Eric Schumacher

Yeah, and it's like Elyse said it's sort of a oh. And by the way thank you Shea for having us having us on here and thank you and Melissa also for endorsing *Worthy*. We really appreciated that.

Eric Schumacher

And you know, like Elyse said, this is somewhat of a continuation of that of that question, and I think you know, as we think about men and women and how we live together in the church, the home, the world. I know that for me, one of the things that sparked writing *Worthy* was taking a look again at what the Bible had to say about women and just asking the question about the relationships between men and women, is what I've believed based on what I think the Bible actually says and how much of it is based on what I've come to believe, and you know, based on other people's teachings, and then sometimes it felt like what I, how the relationships between men and women were playing out was based on someone might have a principle and draw out an implication, and then they draw an implication from that and then make an application off that. And sort of became the norm or a rule. And I didn't really see the Bible speaking to those areas so much, and so I wanted to take a fresh look as much as I could at

the text and see what the Bible said. And one of the things I think that bothered Elyse and I in this conversation is that it seems like any time we talk about men and women in a Christian context, people want to talk about quote on quote gender roles, particularly like who can be a pastor? You know what does headship and submission look like?

Eric Schumacher

And there's a lot of books written on that, and we feel like sometimes the conversations been overtaken by the question of who gets to be in charge and who gets you know do what and not do what and and we both have opinions on that and our respective churches have stances on that. But we you know when we look at the life of Christ, what we see there isn't someone who's who's necessarily asking about or telling us to be concerned about our authority. But telling us to be concerned about how we serve and love our neighbors in a manner that looks like him.

Shea Houdmann

Just full disclosure. Not that this nuisance needed needs to be disclosed, but Eric was actually good friends with my wife all through high school. It's all the way through kindergarten through high school and Eric I've been very grateful for your friendship at the high school reunions I've been dragged to when the only other person I knew was you and Melissa so that thank you for that.

Shea Houdmann

But uhm, no I I really enjoyed reading Worthy and this is a excellent follow up really thought provoking and even still a few things I'm like I don't think I've ever thought of it from that perspective, so I I can't even say at this point that I disagree with anything. But there's still a few points that I'm still definitely noodling on. It's like, that is definitely thought provoking. If nothing else, Jesus and Gender is a very thought provoking book, so thank you both for that so. What implications does the gospel have on being a man or a woman and our relationships together?

Elyse Fitzpatrick

What we wanted to do was ask the question so what does the gospel have to say about gender and in order to do that, we went to Philippians 2. And in Philippians 2 Paul says adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus and quite frankly you know and and I can go on from there. You know who existing in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be exploited. I think that most of what we've seen when people are talking about gender roles or what does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be a woman? It's always trying to answer the question who gets to be boss? And to us, that's the wrong question. If you're asking, if where you begin in your discussions of men and women and who they are in Christ, in the church, in the faith, if where you start is who gets to be boss, it's the wrong question. You've already lost.

Elyse Fitzpatrick

As a matter of fact, I was just noticing this morning in that passage in Philippians 2 in verse three, it says do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. How can you do that and then spend your entire ministry saying you get to be boss? Wherever anybody lands on that question fine, that's not our discussion.

Elyse Fitzpatrick

Our discussion is if what you want to do is prove that one person or another gets to be the boss you were forgetting the very ways that Jesus talked about people who wanted to be in power and he always said don't do that.

Shea Houdmann

Now there's several passages in the Gospels where the disciples had that very attitude. It's like which one of us is going to be in charge, and his rebukes were very strong that that's not what his Kingdom is supposed to be about, so I really appreciate how you pointed that out, but at Got Questions, I don't know if you two know this, but in our entire 20 year history hundreds of thousands of questions submitted and we if we kind of compile all the very similar questions into one the question of can women serve as pastors is our number one question of all time, and it's very much the can women be in charge of the church is what a lot of people are asking or even some of the related passages, it's and it's it's fascinating.

Shea Houdmann

The even beyond that is then it goes down to ok, if women can't be senior pastors over men, well, what about can women do this or this? Or this? They're trying to break it down. Can women be missionaries? Can women be worship leaders? All these things and it's like it's so focused on roles that it can be, you know, limiting it both in your mindset and what you can or can't do when you so focus on what does the Bible say I can't do rather than how can we minister together in the body of Christ? How can we serve one another? Worship together, proclaim the gospel together? How can we be most powerfully used for the Kingdom of God rather than focusing on OK, I can have this role and you can't, and that some can be frustrating. But at the same time I think these are important questions to discuss, but they shouldn't become an obsession, and that's what it seems like it's become for a lot of people.

Eric Schumacher

Yeah, and and I think you know that question of what role is the incarnation play one of the reasons that's so important is because you know, at the heart of the good news is that Jesus took on human nature. You know the author of Hebrews says he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect so that he could be a merciful high priest. And that wasn't just to atone for our sins. And I don't mean to say just atone for our sins as though that's anything small. You know that's the heart of the whole thing is that Jesus died for our sins, but the author goes on to say that because he shared our nature and he was tempted in every way that we are except he was without sin, that he can sympathize with our weaknesses and he understands what it is to to be like us.

Eric Schumacher

And when we think about the fact that he took on human nature and he was sinless, that tells us he is the perfect image of God. What it means for us to be created as God's image bearers as men and women in Genesis 1 and we ask the question, well, what does that look like to live as God's image on Earth, that's what we see in Jesus Christ as he lives on Earth and so. And that's what you know Paul says in Romans 8 that God predestined us to be conformed into the image of Christ, so that he might be the first born among many brothers and sisters.

Eric Schumacher

We're all being conformed into his image, and so what it looks like to be a mature Christian man, and I would say what it looks like to be a mature Christian woman is the Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, that that's what it looks like. And like you pointed out, Shea in those passages where his disciples, or sometimes his disciples Mom, you know one of their mothers is asking like who's going to sit at which side of honor you know in power, in your Kingdom. And he says, if you want to be great, you have to be a servant to everyone and that you know looks like him laying down his life to ransom us from our sins.

Eric Schumacher

And so when Paul says you know, in Philippians 2 everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others. It looks like crucifixion. It looks like dying for the good of other people and that is what we want to say relationships between men and women should look like in Christ and so no matter how you answer those questions of who fills what roles, if everybody is looking out for each others interests and being willing to lay down their life for the good of the other those questions, and I think they're really important, they really don't become as big of a deal in the sense that no one is exploiting that position over the other. Whoever holds it is using it in a sacrificial way for the good of the other, and that that's what it looks like to model Christ.

Shea Houdmann

And I've been in churches where there's an abusive power structure. I've been in companies or ministries organizations where there's an abusive power structure and it can be either men or women in these positions who are using their authority and just something about our human nature tainted by sin that this strives for control. We all want to ultimately, not everyone to try, I know a lot of people, my wife included, has no interest in being the boss of anything but that for a lot of us that's a struggle and that it's like the first question we ask it's like, OK, who's in charge? But that's not the attitude that Christ wants us to have. Another thing I really enjoyed about Jesus and Gender was your focus that christlikeness is not to be couched in exclusively masculine or feminine terms. So elaborate on that a little bit.

Elyse Fitzpatrick

Uhm yeah, the way that we wanted to define the discussion was to call it christic, which basically christic just means you know, like Christ. And a lot of times what we hear is that christic manhood is very masculine. You know, He-man, shoot a gun, that kind of thing. That's what it means to be a christic man, whereas there hasn't been a lot of discussion about what it means to be a christic woman. But femininity would be a person who's gentle and meek.

Elyse Fitzpatrick

And then you start thinking about that and the way, for instance, that Paul talks in Galatians five about the fruit of the spirit. That list of the fruit of the spirit if you're going to think in masculine and so called masculine and feminine terms, those really look like feminine qualities. The way that things are presently being talked about, so in other words, women are patient and meek and kind and gentle. That's what it means to be a woman.

Elyse Fitzpatrick

But what it means to be a man is this other thing. You know you're the leader. You shoot guns. I don't know. What we want to do instead is we want to say no, actually, Jesus Christ is the perfect man and the perfect woman. He perfectly represents us and when we start thinking about what it means to be christic, what we want to say is those qualities we're seeing in Christ and we really need I think in this time to start rethinking what it means to be both masculine and feminine. I don't even, the Bible doesn't use those words. But what it? What does it mean to be a woman who's created in the image of God and also being re created in the image of Christ? What that what does that mean for a man?

Elyse Fitzpatrick

And I think we've got to move past stereotypes, particularly the you know, post World War Two, white American stereo type of you know the wife stays home, the guy goes out and works and that's her business. And that's all fine. I just don't think that that's what the Bible is talking about when it talks about being a male or a female created in the image of God and being re created in the image of Jesus.

Eric Schumacher

I I love what Elise just said there, and that that summarizes so much, you know, goes back to this idea that Jesus is the perfect image of God and you know what what Elyse just said might land on some ears strange and she said that Christ was the perfect man and the perfect woman. And she doesn't mean that Jesus was gender fluid when he lived on Earth. You know, we understand and agree that he was a man and he is a male. You know, a male human being in his resurrected body, but what what we mean by that is there aren't two separate natures. A male nature and a female nature, he became.

Eric Schumacher

If the author of Hebrews can say he became like us in every respect. In fact, that means there's one human nature that we both share, and that Christ assumed. And and that I just think that's that's so important to to understand what it means to live as men and women. We asked the question like who do I look to as a role model in the Bible as to what it means to be a man or to be a woman? And as a male it's easy to say. Well, I look to Jesus as the perfect man and someone says, well, who do I look to as a woman. It feels weird to not be able to say well you look to Jesus because that's who God is conforming our sisters into the image of. And you know, it's it's just struck me for all that I've heard over the years. And a lot that I accepted and taught about what manhood and womanhood looks like in Christ. I came to realize a lot of it came from American stereotypes about masculinity and femininity.

Eric Schumacher

And when we go and we look at the New Testament epistles and we see Paul's instructions for what it looks like to be conformed to the image of Christ. His instructions for discipleship, you know to put on this and put off that, we don't find him saying, you know, there's a few places where he might say to the women I would say this or to older men you know, or younger men I'd say this, but they're very small and and short, and the bulk of it is given to all brothers and sisters, and it's not a gender segregated discipleship in the New Testament. We're all given the same commands to put on the same Christ and bear the same fruit.

Elyse Fitzpatrick

You know one of the things that's one of the things that's really important in this discussion Shea, is that a lot of the discussion in the past has been that men have a certain nature and women have a different nature. It's kind of the men are from Mars, women are from Venus. Whatever that kind of discussion. Well, that has bled over a lot into the church as though there are two different natures. There's a male nature and a female nature and what we're saying is that can't possibly be true. There has to just be one human nature. And yes, of course it's mitigated through our bodies biologically, and we're not saying that it's not, but there's just one human nature.

Elyse Fitzpatrick

And the reason that's important is because if Jesus didn't assume my nature as a woman then I can't be saved, and that's what the incarnation, part of what the incarnation means, is that Jesus took to himself human nature and then lived perfectly as a human in his human nature and then died substitutionally in his human nature, and was resurrected in his human nature. If there are two human natures, one male, one female, and therefore you know people draw from that oh, this is why guys need to be boss or something if that's, if that's true, then women who is our representative? It's not just who should I be like? It is that, but also who's my perfect representative who fulfilled the law on my behalf? Who died in my place? If there's two different humanity's two different human natures, and that I think is so important.

Elyse Fitzpatrick

The other thing is this. If males and females have in fact different natures and you guys are very different than me, then it would be very easy for you to say, well, Elyse is not like us. Therefore I get to objectify her. I get to ignore her because she's not like me and that also is so important, which I personally think is one of the reasons that we've seen some of the problems that we've seen in churches with women being ignored and objectified because they're looked at as beings that have a different nature. And we have to just push back against that as much as we possibly can. One nature male and female, both created in the image of God.

Shea Houdmann

Amen, that's a very important point for us to consider, to remember and apply to how we view each other. I remember in the past couple of decades the first time I met a like a stay at home Dad where the wife was the primary breadwinner for lack of a better term outside of the home and my first reaction? Well, that's that's wrong, but the more I think about it, it's like, is that culturally abnormal? It's like yes. Is there anything specifically in the Bible that I can point to that says that that's wrong or then even making friends with some other couples who the wife in the couple is more has more, quote on quote, stereotypical masculine qualities, and the husband is a little more feminine on some issues. It's like, huh? It's really caused me to rethink what I think about gender roles.

Shea Houdmann

But to me, like the most powerful thing in in your book, is the reminder that Jesus is the ultimate example for both men and women of who we are supposed to be like that we're all supposed be conformed to the image of Christ with men and women equally. And that's that's paradigm shifting in terms of how we view ourselves and how we you know view each other.

Shea Houdmann

So maybe for my last question, in the book you talk a lot about how men and women in the body of Christ can contribute to each other's flourishing. And so how? What are some practical steps that both men and women in the church can take to support each other, encourage one another, and help them to understand what the Bible truly says about gender and how that impacts how we follow Christ together.

Eric Schumacher

I think sort of following on the coattails of that of that what you just said, Shea. I'm so glad that you said that. And and thank you for being willing to say that. You know when we see something that's out of the ordinary for perhaps a tradition, we've grown up in, or circles we naturally walk in. It's easy to simply say that's wrong without saying what does the Bible actually say about that? And I think just coming from that, like encouraging our brothers and sisters to be who God made them to be. It's it's remarkable that we'll all be conformed into the same image, but we won't all be identical. We we have these different personalities and mannerisms and likes and dislikes and the world would be a horrible place if everybody was like Eric Schumacher, it would be, it would be a disaster in so many ways and be very boring and praise God for his diversity.

Eric Schumacher

And one of the reasons I think that's so important Elyse and I were just having a recorded a podcast episode with Preston Sprinkle. A few weeks ago and he was noting in from one of his books a scientific study that was done that on transgender persons and he he noted that I want to say it was 80%, is that right Elyse?

Elyse Fitzpatrick

Yeah.

Eric Schumacher

80% of those in the US identifying as transgender come from evangelical homes, and so to ask, you know that just puts me the question, why such a we're not 80 percent of America as evangelicals. So why are 80% identifying as you know, transgender coming from evangelical homes? And I I have to wonder if our emphasis of these culturally defined stereotypical understandings of masculine and feminine, that we so often see in our, sometimes men ministries and men and women retreats. If our if people in our churches don't go to those and go oh, you know I, I don't fit what the church is saying a Christian woman looks like or I don't, you know I talked to men who struggle with gender identity, you know college students who say I go to these I I grew up going to these retreats and it was all about eating meat and shooting guns and you know he-man stuff and and I liked the theater and you know I mean the this, that or the other. Nothing that's wrong. And but they question, maybe I'm not really a man. Maybe I am a woman trapped in a man's body. And it breaks my heart that maybe we as the church have caused this confusion with stereotypes about men and women that the Bible doesn't actually put forward, and I, and so I think we can, we can love one another by affirming the different strengths and interests and talents and skills that he's given us as men and women even where they

don't fit stereotypes and in some ways I think that doesn't just serve each other as brothers and sisters, but it helps our witness to the world.

Shea Houdmann

Now it's an excellent point and something I have observed as well, and the stereotypical male and female qualities or interest. And when you find yourself, I seem to have more in common with the stuff that supposed to be womanly or manly things. It can lead to confusion where it doesn't have to be. There's nothing wrong with men being interested in things that our culture typically ascribes to the female side of the equation, and vice versa. So thank you for sharing that, but I think it's something a lot of people really need to hear, so.

Shea Houdmann

Eric and Elyse, thank you so much for this interview and again, *Jesus and Gender, Living as Sisters and Brothers in Christ*.

Elyse Fitzpatrick

Thank you Shea.

Shea Houdmann

It's an excellent read and if I were to try to describe it with one adjective, it would be thought provoking. So thank you for I know the all the work that went into it and all the struggles that you two have gone through to lead you to this point where this is a passion of yours and that comes through very clearly in the book, so we'll include some links where you can learn more about Elyse and Eric and the this book and also Worthy their previous book again, well worth studying. So Elyse, Eric, thank you for being on the Got Questions Podcast today.

Eric Schumacher

Thank you for having us.

Shea Houdmann

Got Questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.