

Transcript 153 part 1

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. So if you've been following the the show, you'll know that we just recently finished going through, finally, our top 20 questions of all time. Didn't we do them in order. But today we're going to kind of do like sort of a Part 2 or maybe just a another way of looking at the issues on our number one question of all time and that is what does the Bible say about women serving as pastors. So joining me today is Doctor Sandra Glahn. She's a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. She was my professor for a couple of classes in my Masters program, so Sandra, Doctor Glahn, welcome back to the show.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Pleasure to be here. Love the work you're doing. Thank you.

Shea Houdmann

So let's just start off with the issue kind of in a more general question. This has been a very controversial issue in evangelicalism for much of the much of the church for decades now. And one question that I've seen come in more recently is not someone who's maybe taking a strong view on either side, but kind of why is this still such a big debate? Isn't the Bible clear on this and why are there godly, Jesus loving, Bible committed to Christians on both sides of this issue who disagree very, very strongly with each other? And I'm not asking you to solve the debate but in your observation, what is the reason why we can have good dedicated Christians on both sides of this issue?

Doctor Sandra Glahn

I think it's because when you look at a passage like meat being sacrificed to idols, it's really clear to us what's cultural and what's trans cultural. When you come to verses like women being silent in the church or women not permitted to speak, or often Tain which we translate authority. But you know what does it mean? That is a little less clear because it's in a context of talking about women saved through childbearing in a city where the primary godness, goddess is a goddess of midwifery. So just trying to unpack what, how much, what do I do with cultural hermeneutics? I really want to be faithful to scripture, but I don't also want to be right. You get the question right. And and so there is, there is a questioning of motives on either side just to begin with. And and so I know that you and I both agree that we have to begin with hermeneutic of charity, this acknowledgement of what you just said, that there are really good Bible loving Bible believing people that are that have not bought into radical radical feminism but also haven't bought into radical misogyny on both sides, just trying to do what the scripture says. And and they're a little bit fraught because we have women prophets. Miriam is a woman prophet. Huldah it as a woman prophet. And so if we're going to say women silence in a context of worship and and Bible is rooted in creation, we have to reconcile that with the entire scripture and not just the epistle in which it was written.

Shea Houdmann

In our conversation before the show, you told me that you wrote your doctoral paper on one of the issues, so hopefully going to get to that because I'm very curious how you handle that passage. But just

jump into a little bit, maybe some of the other common questions we're receiving lately about this issue, and then do that I think you you put the flesh out exactly the direction that you take in interpreting these passages. So I'm hearing a lot of people talk about, this kind of goes back to Southern Baptists of controversy with Rick Warren and so forth of a couple both taking over a pastoral role. And I'm not even sure all the ins and outs of that situation, nor do we really need to address that specifically.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Neither you have.

Shea Houdmann

But it raises the question for a lot of people. I see churches who are now ordaining, or even just calling women into pastoral roles, even with the title of pastor, as long as it does not involve teaching or exercising authority over men. So trying to find a way for women to be recognized for their gifts, while not also contradicting the passage in First Timothy. And what do you think of that viewpoint, and how does that fit with the way that God's been leading you?

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Yeah, great question. And it and it begins with what is a pastor? And we both know that word means a shepherd. And when you come into the and then you start dividing, well, what's the difference between a spiritual gift and a church office? And just for the sake of conversation, I typically would say an office is something you have to be vetted for, that there are human requirements for, right, like husband and wife, wife and one husband, you know, given to hospitality not given to drink, not greedy. That's a list of things that you can't hold the office unless you meet those qualifications. Where is a spiritual gift, every single Christian gets a spiritual gift, and it's for the good of the body of Christ. It's part of what is exercised in community. It is not in isolation. And so what you see is pastoring on the side of gifting rather than on the list of offices, right? So to even ask can a woman hold the office of Pastor can just sort of you know, make you wait. Let's that's that's the question is coming too late. We need to back up and say, should we be using the title of pastor for an office that you're vetting people for when the scriptures describe it as being something that is a spiritual gift.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

And the first person to really open my eyes or alert me to that was Harold Hohner, who for years ago was the DTS department chair in the New Testament Department. And he was asking the same question that we're asking now. And he pointed out the difference between an office and a gift. So there's a difference of opinion on that even you know, what, what's going to fall in our gift column and what's going to fall in our office column. But that's where a lot of the misunderstanding happens because if you equate senior pastor with the list that is given to men of what they're quote, you know they're vetted for, then you can see how that would be very confusing. Why are you putting woman on the man's side of the line?

Doctor Sandra Glahn

But what often also gets left out of the conversation is we have a lot more women in the Academy studying church history now that we used to have. And it's not at all that our brothers didn't care, but it wasn't as immediate I think for for my brothers. And so what's been interesting for me has been to stop

as a Protestant and say, hey, where did nuns come from? That, that, that may go all the way back to the New Testament. Even as early as the well 1st and 2nd century, 2nd century really you're looking at the office of Widow we have ordination prayers in the 5th century for the office of widow. And so the church had mothers and fathers. The church wasn't a single parent family. And I think that is sometimes what's missing in the conversation is if we're going to say, well, we can't have a woman and the title on the man's side, we're not then saying, OK, but then where are our mothers? And what are the moms doing in the church? And I don't mean biological mothers, of course. I mean the mothers of the church. So it's complicated, right? It's a really complex question, and even how we what terms we use to describe, we can we might need English to English translation sometimes sometimes right? Because I might be meaning pastor when you're thinking elder and you're hearing Elder when I'm thinking pastor. And we we have to get on the same page with our terminology sometimes to even have a conversation.

Shea Houdmann

And it can definitely vary even from church to church in terms of the the church's polity. If do you view the pastor as an elder? And your do your bylaws say that every pastor on your staff is considered an elder? Well, then that raising the question, ok, then how do you interpret the qualifications for elders which uses exclusively masculine language. Now, whether that's by intent or whether that's intended to restrict women, that's a whole other question as well, but.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Right. And that's a whole other, right.

Shea Houdmann

No, it's it gets tricky. It gets slippery, and that's the sense of every viewpoint you take impacts how you interpret other things. And try to come with an all-encompassing interpretation of this is difficult because there's so many moving parts.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Right. And I'm in a brethren background church, which does not have a senior pastor. It is elder led. So we have a preaching team. And so the there's no such thing as a senior pastor in my congregation. And like, as you said. But there are other congregations where you might have a Bishop over a city, but then the individual churches might have men and women on the preaching team. But a woman can't you know, is limited from being a Bishop. And if you walk into that church, you know you might have people saying you're egalitarians. So there are so many structures. Here's what I think is the beauty of that, I think that the apostle Paul, when he is choosing words to describe how to organize the church goes out of his way to find words that are devoid of power. He never calls himself even a servant leader of the Church of XYZ. It's always a servant or a slave of. As we in the West, who have to go back and pump back up the the power words in that. But it's like old guy. Widow is the most vulnerable thing a woman can be in his, in Paul's culture, right? So he's choosing that to say she needs to have been the wife of one husband. And her her qualifications, really kind of match up with those of the elder of the moms and Dads in the church and then sisters and brothers in the church. And deacon means you know what Deacon means? It means servant.

Shea Houdmann

Right.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

So that's part of the challenge is that Paul, sometimes we can't tell, is Paul talking about a servant or is he talking about somebody in an office? You have Phoebe as an example. You know Romans 12:1 everywhere else we've translated Diaconis, the word Deacon. We, you know, we've assumed it's an office, right? The acts deacons are a a question, we're not sure if they have office. But but then Phoebe comes along and call Paul calls her a a Deacon. There's no such. There's not a feminine ending in his day. On that we don't have teacher and teachess and the word Deacon is is just servant. And so some translations go with she's a Deacon of and they just transliterate it. Others say no, no, you can't have a woman in the office of deacons. So we're going to translate it for her as a servant. And so then you get women coming to seminary going translate and going, wait. Same word for a woman is translated one way, and for a man translated another way. And so this is part of what is keeping the conversation alive certainly because because Paul has gone out of his way to get rid of power words. So we're trying to figure out where is the authority lie.

Shea Houdmann

I really like your focus. You touched on briefly about here in the West, Western Christianity, and I'm sure it's true in other parts of the world too. But focus on the title and how I I have to have this certain title. So someone who's serving in every sense as a a pastor, servant, leader, Shepherd, but they don't have the title, they sometimes somehow feel like a second class Christian. And like I get that because titles in our culture is are very, very important. So like, what do you do is often the first question we asked someone. So they say, oh, I'm a a servant leader at our church, it's like.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

My introduction today, I'm a professor at Dallas Seminary, and there's nothing wrong with that right? But we are very much in a culture that sort of gets to know one another with what do you what do you do? What is your title? And one of the challenges I think that women in the church have faced at times is that there are times when a title can open doors and it can help you minister more. You can walk into a place and have more credibility and get more resources for your people. And so if the men are given a certain title and the women are doing the same thing. And the women say, oh, I don't you don't call me that, then they can sometimes get accused of being power hungry. It's like, well, that again is assuming motive. And to to bring in questions of justice and fairness, sometimes you know we'll we'll have a new knee jerk, hey, the church isn't about rights, and yet the church is about justice. We're called the do justice and love mercy. And so, you know, maybe the solution is not to give women titles. To take the titles away from the man and start saying, hey, let's just call ourselves servants of Christ. But that's a little idealistic too, because there are times when that title really will help with credibility in a in a good way and in service of the sheep. Right? So it's it's a fraught question.

Shea Houdmann

To me, the the whole conversation so far kind of like a little bit of an intro. So I just want to like, come out and actually ask you. I know we could just do an entire episode just on you explaining this, so keep it brief and not because you're you're long winded, but you're not. But like I said, this could go on and on. Describe for both for me and for the our listeners, what exactly is your viewpoint on the question of can

women service pastors? Specifically, can women serve as teaching shepherding roles over men in the church?

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Yeah. Woo, that is a. Wow, OK, let's go straight forward. Right. First of all, I would call a woman a pastor in the same way I would call a woman a giver and an evangelist and any of the other spiritual gifts. And so I think it's completely appropriate to call a woman, a small groups pastor or a children's pastor, or you know any of the many, many pastoral gifts that are expressed that we've made into vocation. When the church has had enough resources to actually pay for for work, I think that that is consistent with the New Testament. But I also think it kind of depends on how that church is using the word, right? Because if they're equating the word pastor with Elder, that can be really confusing.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

So I, I am not in a church that has has a senior pastor and it's my first experience in the last 10 years. I don't ever want to go back to a church that does have a Senior pastor because seeing the decentralized power, I've really seen people step up and fill in when they're not thinking the pastor will make that call. Pastor will. OK, so I, do I believe men and women can be senior pastors. No, but do I believe it's OK to call, call, use those titles in America? Sure, but this is the problem we're going to have when we use them. We're going to have to explain this. So I think that the church has mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers. I don't see women called elders, but I don't see elders called widows. Right. I don't see mothers called fathers, and I don't see fathers called mothers. We need all of them. Does that answer your question? Did I leave something out?

Shea Houdmann

It does. I mean OK, we we discussed ahead of time like I didn't want you'd have to, I need to know exactly where do you stand on all these issues before I'll have you on the show because like if you listen to this podcast I multiple times have people who have a slightly different or even a very different viewpoint as long as it's within the whole realm of orthodoxy. But on this one, it's just as you were saying, so much plays into it and the churches...

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Yeah, go ahead.

Shea Houdmann

The churches I've been a part of for most of my life, Bible Churches, Baptist churches, and now even Evangelical Free Churches, generally, we would not give the actual title to a of pastor to a woman just because of the baggage attached to it. Most people think the word Pastor, especially in those churches, they think of the teaching pastor. But in terms of like the functioning role and every church I've been in, there have been women who have been pastors and the sense of shepherds over over women, over over children, over even leaders in the church setting examples that men can follow like a shepherd would do so. To me, I I'm not that interested in the title. I'm more of interested in recognizing God's calling, those sorts of things, but also the way I've both always been taught in in in my own study of the passages I'm would be with you, I I could not attend a church with a senior teaching pastor again with all

the baggage that goes along with that who is a woman just because of First Timothy, the qualifications for elders.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Understanding of opportunity, yeah.

Shea Houdmann

Although I don't equate Elder and Pastor so that that's the conviction that I've come to. But I've also firmly convinced that many churches within conservative evangelicalism take this way too far in terms of limiting oh, so you're a woman, oh here, you can serve in the children's ministry and you can go to women's retreats and that's it. It's like, no, that's just as unbiblical as the other extreme.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

So on the same page there and I think don't you think it goes back to Genesis when it's not good for a man to be alone? It's not good for a woman to be alone either. The point is we need each other. And women are leaving the church in droves, like the hugest demographic, leaving the church. And so often they're they're not hearing themselves represented in sermon illustrations. They're not seeing themselves visually in leader leadership and I just, I mean like on the stage or maybe a worship leader. Like, it's just they can go to a Fortune 500 company and use their gifts for the good of the company and they want so much to channel that for Christ and many times in the context of the church, they they don't see that they can do that. And so again, I know that we're on the same page with that. It's like we we want to be biblical. We also want to, which is not in contradiction, we want men and women partnering together rather than, you know, when I see an all women committee, even for Women's Bible study, it kind of gives me hives because. And, and I would hope the same would be true of an all male missions committee, right? That where where is our belief in the complementarity of man and woman here that we need each other. That we don't even have to understand it, what our differences bring to the table right? We just have to know in some mysterious God created way, we need each other. There's good research from the business world, that business boards that are all male or all female do not make as ethical of decisions as boards that have men and women on them. There's just something about the way God has made man and woman to work together, and it's not just in marriage, right? It's we're on the front lines serving together.

Shea Houdmann

You think of even the word complementarian, which is typically the viewpoint that says it's not the patriarchal it's supposed to be men and women serving complementary roles, but in a lot of churches where they use the term just through observation, a lot of women have come away to conclusion this is not complementary, and this is men get all the leadership roles women get the subservient roles. But that's that's not complementary. That's some, I don't know what the right term for that would be but that's that's that's not what people. What we seem to be saying, even by the definition of the word doesn't match how it often works out in practice.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Absolutely right.

Shea Houdmann

I can see how that would be extremely discouraging, off putting for women who are who have spiritual gifts, who are called to serve God in meaningful ways constantly being pushed into, I mean, don't get wrong children need to be shepherded. Other women need to be shepherding. There are roles in the church that ultimately are subservient in a sense that someone's got to be doing those. But let's say, well, those are, that's women's work or those are women's jobs, that doesn't fit the teaching of the New Testament at all.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

It does not. And if you think about how broken our homes are. How much we need again, men and women partnering in the Children's ministry. So if you are in a completely broken home, you still can see what it looks like for healthy male female relationships to be talking about God's word together and sharing their testimonies together and using their gifts together. And so even the idea of putting women over the children, it's like, oh, but we need the men there too. It's all the way through the church from the tiniest tot to the the oldest oxygenate and and older, we need men and women ministering in all of those capacities. And you're absolutely right. Sometimes the complementarian is a euphemism for hardline hierarchy. But sometimes it isn't. Right? Like, so we've seen just a broad, broad range of. I I have seen like since church to need me too has really brought out into the open what a lot of patterns have been that have been hidden under the surface. And so I think that often we have warned about extreme ends of radical feminism while not guarding against extreme misogyny. And and because women have been kept out of some of the important conversations, then you you need them in there for the abuse conversations, right? Like it can be triggering for a woman to have to you know, the elders will meet you at the altar. It's like, well, maybe you need women up there too, because a lot of women aren't going to feel comfortable if they're coming out of an abusive man situation, going and talking to a man that they haven't established trust with. For lots of reasons, we we need each other. And that I think is the thing that sometimes gets lost in the conversation about the big question, can a woman be a pastor? Does the church need women shepherds? Yes.

Shea Houdmann

I love what you shared earlier about whether it's a business board or even like a board of like a nonprofit being all men or all women missing out on the insights that the opposite sex could provide them. Before I started Got Questions, I was serving at a ministry that was almost exclusively for women. I worked in the the shipping department, in the IT department, which are kind of the two departments where they allowed the men to work.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

You've got relegated to.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, yeah, but a couple of times, this hearing like decisions that came from the board, I was like, that's a really weird decision. And now my wife serves on the board of that ministry and it's still an all female board, but she also serves on the board for our local the Rocky Mountain District of the church denomination that we attend, and she's the only woman on that board. And the insights she's getting

from how a group of men operate versus how a group of women operate it's like, yeah it's fascinating and that how they approach things. The things they don't typically think of, even having one or two people of the opposite gender on there would really help. So Complementarianism can have so many applications beyond how the term is often used.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Right use in terms of authority for sure. So one of the first things I do regardless of where my students fall on the spectrum of authority in the church and male and female is to ask them, look at your church, look at your greeters, look at the people who stand at the altar if you have an altar call, look at the people who are handing out bulletins. Look at your Sunday school teachers. Look at your boards. And ask are we reflecting that we value men and women partnering together? Regardless, that's something that there's a there's a lot of overlap there. And that is often where some of the abuse gets shifted out, shifted out because again, if there a woman who's been abused is probably going to feel more comfortable coming to me than she would to you. Although once you show up over the long term then it can be well, I can't I can't tell my friends that all men are a certain way because I got this brother in Christ who is not that way. And so it's certain kinds of men that are that way and that's healing too, right to to have the brothers rise up and say not all men are this way. Not all women are this way. Christlike men and women, are different.

Shea Houdmann

So you mentioned earlier maybe this can be our our closing question. Women leaving the church in droves due to the unbiblical ways that women are pushed into very restricting ministries. I don't know if that's the best way of explaining, you know what I mean? What would you say? What are some of the very practical solutions that churches can implement that would minimize that. That would promote women serving God in meaningful ways that we're we're currently missing out on.

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Yeah, great question. Thank you for asking it. First of all, I would encourage those on the preaching team to if you, if you're coming up on Father's Day, don't do a father son illustration. Assume some fathers have daughters. Like let, include business women and not just moms in your illustrations. Very high number of widows and never married women in the congregation, represent them in your sermon illustrations. Another thing is with the Protestant Reformation, we got a correction which was a good correction and that we don't have sort of a hierarchy of sainthood. That when Paul talks about holy people, he calls us all saints. And that's good. But what we lost in that was the church used to tell a story every day of the year, and especially on the weekends of a man or a woman of faith and and that's why we still have Saint Valentine's Day. We still have Saint Patrick's Day. We still have the feast of Stephen. Those are all days when those people with great testimonies died and that became their day. And what we really lost was the stories of women. The church used to know who's blandina, whose prexies whose budenz Diana, these are all people who gave their lives for Christ. They gave up their lives or martyred either by sacrifice in the way they lived or by physically losing their heads. Tell stories of women include testimonies of of in the church history, I would say of men and women, because a lot of women think that they have no shoulders to stand on in the church. And there are lots and lots of stories through the centuries that we need to recover that we have lost really in the last 500 years. Those are the other place I would start is what I mentioned that I that I walk my students through and that is look at your

entire church from your nursery to your elementary school, Sunday school or whatever you want to call it, your adult Bible fellowships. Where can you have men and women partnering? Where can you model partnering? Where can you invite people in? If you have an elder meeting and you don't believe women should be on the older board that doesn't mean you can't have conversation partners or, you know bringing them in for issues and asking them to just share their wisdom. Including them in that leadership process, not because there's a vying for power, but because there's an acknowledgement that we need each other and we might have blind spots we don't even know that we have. Boy, if the church did just those those things we could do a lot of healing.

Shea Houdmann

Ok Sandra, I've got a an idea. Do you have time to stick around? We could do a Part 2 where we could actually dive into the first Timothy passage and maybe a couple others?

Doctor Sandra Glahn

Oh my OK, sure.

Shea Houdmann

All right, so I'm now announcing they'll now be a Part 2 to this episode, so let me go ahead and close this one off at stay tuned probably next week for Part 2, this where we're going to dive into the biblical passages. Just like I said earlier there I'm I just learned before we started recording that Sandra wrote her dissertation on a specific aspect of that First Timothy Passage, and I'm fascinated to hear how God has led her to understand that passage. So this has been the Got Questions podcast on discussing the top question of all time, women and ministry. Can women serve as pastors but from a very practical perspective. Part 2 we're going to jump into it here in a minute. There's going to be more. Let's dive into the passages. So Got Questions? The Bible has answers, and we'll help you find them.