

Introduction: Welcome to Engage 360 Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the Gospel and the life changing truth of scripture at work in our culture today.

Dr. Don Payne: Hello, again, everybody, this is Engage 360 from Denver Seminary. I'm Don Payne. Glad you have joined us. Many of you will be familiar with the enigma code that the Nazi's used during World War II. And that enigma code has been the subject of numerous documentaries and movies. One of the things that one of the factors that the allies found is so perplexing about the enigma code was not only its complexity, but the fact that it kept changing. And that in a way is a pretty good metaphor for what many of us experienced today with trying to engage a culture, or cultures, that continually change in all their complexity, but engage them from the vantage point of the universals, the universal truths of the Christian faith. So today we're really privileged to have a couple of astute colleagues to join us and help us through this. Dr. Doug Groothuis and Dr. Andrew Shepherdson. Welcome gentlemen.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Hey, thanks for having me.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: Hello. Thank you.

Dr. Don Payne: Many of you will know Doug's name. He's been on the faculty here since I think 1993, spoken and written widely. And many of you may be familiar with one or more of his books, but particularly his, I guess you'd call it your Magnum Opus, Doug, right? Christian Apologetics.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Yes, I think so.

Dr. Don Payne: And that is now a second edition of that is in the works hopefully to come out sometime next year. Ike Shepherdson has been on our adjunct faculty for two or three years now, I think teaches with Doug in the arena of Apologetics and ethics. Ike is a published author and is what we might call tri-vocational, I think, is that fair to say?

Dr. Ike Shepardson: That's fair. That's about three or three or four of them now.

Dr. Don Payne: In addition to serving on our adjunct faculty here and a very esteemed colleague in that role, Ike also works as what is it? A software engineer?

Dr. Ike Shepardson: A software sales. I can talk about it, but I can't build it. Okay.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Okay. And also is on the pastoral staff of a local congregation. So we're really, really glad that both Ike and Doug can join us to help us think through what it means to engage our culture apologetically for the Christian faith and engage our culture in ministry in general with the historical faith once delivered to the saints. So gentlemen, get us out of the gate here, as you think about culture, what has particularly the culture or cultures that we inhabit here in the

US or in the Western world, what are some of the changes? What has changed? What has stayed the same through some of these cultural shifts of the past few decades?

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Well, I can start, I think with some things that have stayed the same, and maybe I can speak to changes. The human condition is the same. We are made in God's image and likeness, but we are fallen and we need redemption from God. We cannot find it in ourselves. And so cultures express that createdness and that fallenness in different ways, but they're constants of the human situation. And we want to speak the truth in love to our generation, we can count on that. So when we explain what sin is, that it's a radical offense to a Holy God. We speak of repentance unto life and following Jesus, we have to do a lot of work to make that understandable to people because they might misconstrue what we're saying because of the words or because of the tone. But we know that the gospel is still the same, that God does not change. And our need for grace through the work of Christ does not change. So I take that to be very encouraging in my role as a Christian apologist and a witness to Christ.

Dr. Don Payne: I appreciate what you said, Doug, about those realities being expressed differently or iterated somewhat differently over time in cultures. Go ahead.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Yeah. Why don't I let Ike speak to that?

Dr. Ike Shepardson: Yeah. What I was going to say is that I've seen a lot of changes in the cognitive and experiential distance that people have with historic Christian faith, especially in the city. That's my context in ministry is serving a church in Denver, right by the University of Denver area. And people, I think in my parents' generation had some facility or understanding of what Christianity was. Even if they hadn't read the Bible, they had a general respect for it. And even if they didn't believe in Jesus, they knew that somehow Jesus was important, but in my generation and the generation of the young people that attend my church and that we try to reach, they simply don't have that same experience of Christianity being something that is meaningful, even if they don't participate in it.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. It's not even a cultural touch point for them. Right.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: That's right. If I say, you know, the Bible says this, that I might as well be saying, you know, the Quran says some interesting things, or Steve Jobs said something that was profound while he was alive.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Just another quote.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: And maybe it's wise, and maybe it's perfectly relevant for me, but there's no, there's nothing that goes from person to person to show this is meaningful for all of us. And I think that's especially the case when we start using jargon, even something like sin or repentance, these don't mean the same things to this generation as they have in the past.

Dr. Don Payne: What kind of ministry work, if I can put it that crassly, like what kind of ministry work does that create for us that is more generationally novel perhaps. And one of the, but before you answer that, one of the things I appreciate about you two men, is that while you're both in the lane of philosophy and apologetics and cultural engagement, you're from two different generations. And as far as I know, two different Christian traditions, two different denominational backgrounds. And so I love the variety that you bring to this conversation. But go ahead with that. If you haven't forgotten what I asked, I have.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: No, I know exactly what you're getting at, what it means, and this is exactly what apologetics tries to do. It means that we need an act of translation between what the historic Christian faith proclaims and the lexicon that the culture is ready to use in interpreting it. And that just means that we need to help people to understand what we mean when we say things. In apologetic preaching, it means that when you say something that's a loaded term, theologically, you explain what it means in culturally relevant language. You say, if I'm going to say sin, I have to say, well, you have to understand that God is Holy and he has a law, and it's possible to break that law. It's possible to miss the mark of what God's perfection is, to transgress a barrier, a boundary that you're not supposed to go outside of. And if we've done that, then that alienates us from God. It makes us strangers. When we should be friends, this kind of translation project can help people to understand just what it is that Christians proclaim.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Right. And then also we can use examples from literature or perhaps from films or poems or something like that. Once we have defined what we mean, we can say, now here's an illustration of this theme. And of course, scripture has so many imaginative elements like the parables and so on. And people relate to stories, true stories, fictional stories. Of course, the scripture is the ultimate narrative, the ultimate story of God's revelation and redemption. But that's where we try to find common ground. We need to define who God is, what the gospel is, and then what our need is for the gospel. And I think explaining sin is a challenging one today because of many things: relativism, for one thing, there really is no absolute right and wrong. And then another would be a kind of Eastern influence spirituality where there really is no sin against God. There might be a little bad karma here and there, but the answer is not to look outside of ourselves to God, but to go inside and to find this inner God, this higher level of consciousness. So even before we defend something like the reliability of the Bible or the deity of Jesus, we have to really be very careful to explain our terms and then pick examples that will help illustrate those terms.

Dr. Don Payne: So there's a lot of backfill in a sense that has to be done. Yeah. Ike I'm interested, in what you have experienced as a pastor, even more broadly as you've plowed this field. So to speak in a culture that has changed pretty dramatically. And in terms of what its touch points are, what its knowledge base is. What are some of the other challenges and, maybe even the exciting opportunities that you have experienced Pastorally.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: You know, the opportunity is that people are still interested in the spiritual life. Even if they don't have a respect for traditional institutions like the church, they still know that there's something that's important that happens, that's deeper than the meeting of our physical needs or playing hard on the weekend or making lots of money. They know that there's something that's missing. And so there's an incredible opportunity to connect with that base human desire for transcendence. The challenge is when you go with a message of come to church on Sunday, come to my hope group that meets in my house. There's not that same respect for those rhythmic kinds of institutions that Christians have found so meaningful over the millennia.

Dr. Don Payne: That could be taken to suggest some pretty dramatic shifts in the way we envision church, or at least the, some of the rhythms and the practices of church. And for those of us who have a deep respect for the historical anchor points of the church and its place in the world, that can be a stretch.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: That's exactly right. And what that means is that in, sorry to speak over you, Doug, to what that means in training the saints, it's the impetus is all the more there to help them to become ambassadors. So that when church isn't necessarily about trying to gather as many lost sheep as possible, although, gosh, we were open to that and we love that, but it's about training people to be shepherds after God's own heart, to be ambassadors for the Gospel, so that they can go out and have touch points with people to bring the light of the Gospel with them everywhere that they go.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Right. And I think the church itself is an apologetic. The fact that it exists at all is because of the death, burial and resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. And we bear witness to that. But also a lot of people, not, not just younger people, but I think especially those maybe under 35 are looking for some kind of sacred rhythm in their life. And that's exactly what the church provides in terms of worship and prayer. And so on. There's an article in the New York times recently about consultants who are trying to add spiritual rituals to the business world because people feel a need to find the sacred in their everyday life. And from what I saw in the article, there was really nothing of Christian content there, but we can say here's a sacred story that happens to be true and rational and meaningful. And these are ways that Christians have embodied this by having a gathering and praying and hearing the scripture taught by being accountable to one another and so on. So that embodied story is significant. It's not just another story. It's a story with rational support.

There's good reason to believe that God created the world. He brought to being the world into being that he designed the world and so on. And, and that's what we teach in our classes at Denver Seminary is that we do have a reason for the hope that is within us, but there's always that meaning dimension. You've got to speak to meaning and truth because people can find some things deeply meaningful that are not true. So we need to tell a good and compelling story, but say that this connects with reality that God in fact, came to earth in space-time history in Jesus Christ. He died to atone for the sins of the world and so on.

And of course, we're not going to use words like atone when we're talking to unbelievers, we'll have to illustrate that, and talk about what it means to be reconciled to God and to one another, and what the sacrifice of Christ means. So that work of translation and of a transposition as CS Lewis put, it needs to go on.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. When you, he made me think of a couple of things. Doug, when we use the word atone in our current culture, they'll think we're making a musical reference of some sort. But you get the joke. Yeah, it took you a minute. But on a, on a more serious note, you also remind me of a really interesting book from some years ago by Curtis Chang called Engaging Unbelief. Chang was for some years, the director of InterVarsity Christian fellowship at Harvard. And I think this may have been his published master's thesis, but he did a really fascinating overview of Augustin's city of God and of Thomas Aquinas, Contra Gentiles against the Gentiles. And he argued that in both of those works separated by several hundred years from each other, the same apologetic missional strategy was being employed. In both cases, Chang argues, they were arguing that the narrative of the Gospel superseded and was truer and more compelling than the prevailing cultural narrative Augustin and arguing against Roman culture and Aquinas arguing against the Islamic Aristotelianism of his day. And they were making a Gospel apologetic that was narratively based against the prevailing cultural narratives.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: Yeah. And I have an example of that, and that's in our culture today. You see people who the ultimate sin is racism or bigotry or misogyny or homophobia, and to atone for that, you need to consistently virtue signal again and again, through social media, through saying the right things publicly, you have to give to the right place and make sure people see you do it. And it's atoning for those sins over and over and over. Whereas in the Christian worldview, we find ourselves in this wretched place of being broken and unable to fix both ourselves and the world. And once for all Christ provides atonement for us.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Right. I think people today are dealing with a sense of shame and guilt and confusion. And Ike is right that apart from Christ it's feudal, meaning we need to make amends for things, we need to mend our ways in a variety of contexts. But the ultimate issue is how can we find forgiveness and new life? And the book of Hebrews says over and over that the sacrifices in the Old Testament system illustrated what was to come, but they could not take away sin. Only the sacrifice of Christ can redeem us from sin by providing what we could never provide for taking our place and bearing our punishment and so on. And then giving us his righteousness. I think people are thinking a lot about guilt and they won't use this word, but probably atonement, but it's a self kind of atonement, or it's a superficial atonement that is not efficacious. The blood of Christ is efficacious for time in eternity.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, this is I had not intended our conversation take this direction, but I think it's an important one because with everything going on in the racially charged culture of the current day and with the injustices, the atrocities, the travesties

that you know, must not be diluted or ignored. I think you're putting your finger on something really sensitive. And that is that when you try to bring the Gospel into these conversations, and many Christians are really struggling to do that very thing right now, what does it mean? What does the Gospel mean in these conversations and what you're highlighting Doug or both of you actually is that we're becoming aware of guilt and the shame where there is no place to put it. It becomes the way it's being popularized. If I can put it that way, is in the form of a, sort of a vortex, a moral vortex that has no bottom to it. And so there is no final atonement and where people will often, it seems to me tend to polarize the conversation is either to trivialize the injustices so that we don't feel as badly about them or to wallow in them such that there is no end to the conversation. And the Gospel does give us a way or a place to put even the most egregious sin. Now, of course, and that does not in any way abrogate or dilute the need for repentance, for utter clear ownership of evil that has been done. And yet it gives us a place to go where genuine atonement. And so maybe I, you know, I'm wondering, thinking out loud here, whether, whether we have the opportunity, the unique opportunity culturally, to make atonement by whatever word, and set of descriptions we use, to make that an engaging and an applaudable concept once again.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: I feel an essay coming on, Don, maybe a book, but I'm thinking of, what's been said many times that Jesus came to justify sinners through his work, but not to justify sin. So sin is sin against God and against our neighbor. And as I've been studying and writing on the atonement quite a bit in the last four or five months, I realized that one of the aspects of the atonement it's central is that we can be reconciled to our neighbor. Paul says that's a fruit of the atonement. It's not merely being reconciled to God through the medial work of Jesus. But out of that comes love and reconciliation with neighbor. It's not kind of a distant after effect, it's part and parcel of what Christ's atoning work is all about.

Dr. Don Payne: And it's, wouldn't you say, a metric that being reconciled to our neighbor is a metric of atonement.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Right. We show our faith by our good works. Yes.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: I think even if you look at the history of what happened at the atonement, what you have is a Palestinian Jew who was looked at by his oppressors as if he was a dog. In the corner of one of the most abusive societies in the history of the world. And while he's nailed to a cross after a sham trial, he's mocked by the very people who he proclaims that God would save them. And he offers forgiveness to them from the cross for the people who look down on him as this cursed minority, but in rising from the dead, what he promises is new life for all those who would call on his name. And this is significant too. If you look in the book of Revelation, in the new heavens and the new earth, the tree bears healing to the nations, to the ethne of the world that is offered through, through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, as a persecuted minority suffering this terrible injustice.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Yeah. And that's, that's an important theme for today. I'm thinking of Howard Thurman's little but very profound book called *Jesus and the Dispossessed*. He emphasizes that a marginal minority oppressed status of Jesus Christ, who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who emptied himself and became one of us to redeem us as you so beautifully said.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Yeah. His entry into the ultimate injustice and oppression is the thing that redeems us in some respect.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: And he had all the power. And I say that as, as a white man who has privilege, Jesus had all the power and laid it all down. And that's an example to somebody like me who has influence and privilege where I can say I have somebody to follow, laying down my resources, my influence, even to bring up the influence of other people. To say, I can be, I can be less, so that Christ can be more, there's a lot more room for me to lessen myself, to empty myself, following my savior, who did the same thing.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Right. And we have the promise that God opposes the proud and exalts the humble. So the way of humility has been shown by Jesus, and he calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow him. And I think it's great. We've been talking about Christ and the atonement and healing because some people think apologetics is very abstract and maybe academic, but the way we teach it at Denver Seminary is very evangelistically oriented. We want to bring people to the Cross of Christ as quickly as possible through apologetics. We don't view apologetics as just an academic discipline to impress other apologists and then publish these things in obscure journals that nobody reads. Now, we need to do a good academic work, and I and Ike both have doctorates and we have academic publications, but we want to take this to the streets and we want to call out to people and say, come to Christ. You have every reason to do so and no good reason not to. And I think that's come out of our conversation here today.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Doug, let me ask you a question. You're sort of the seasoned KG veteran here in apologetics. And as you.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: You mean the old guy.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, I didn't exactly say that.

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Okay. You're my age, you know.

Dr. Don Payne: I know. I know. I know, but I have the mic here. Okay. So as the KG veteran here in apologetics, you know, as you've studied and practiced it over the years how has your thinking deepened or shifted or seasoned about apologetics and apologetic strategy?

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Well, I think most recently I've really gotten into the work of Christ. And in theology, typically you talk about the person of Christ in terms of his deity. His

humanity his works of miracles and so on. And the work of Christ is usually the cross and the atonement, and I've been rewriting or updating my Christian apologetics book. And I've gotten pretty deeply into the atonement. I'll probably have two chapters on it in the second edition. And of course, I believe this for over 40 years and I've taught it. But when I looked at my first edition of Christian Apologetics, I realized that I had far more on the person of Christ and I don't gain say anything that I said there, but I really didn't have enough on the work of Christ. And what the blood of Christ achieves for us and how it works, and then how to defend that apologetically against challenges by heretics, like Socenus, and others and so on. So I want to go ever deeper into the work of Christ and defending what he's done and making it clear to people. And then also, of course, this is not just defending an idea, it's being a Christ follower and deeply understanding and appropriating the work of grace on my behalf. And I want to challenge my students to bring people to the cross and to bring themselves to the cross for strength and wisdom and blessing in the great work of apologetics.

Dr. Don Payne: Indeed. Indeed. Well, Hey, I had a number of other questions that might give us just an excuse for another conversation. I wanted to talk about post-Christian culture and technology and politics and economics and all of that, but we'll that would be going from the sublime to the ridiculous, I think in light of where our conversation has gone. So we'll save that for another conversation. But leave us each of you maybe with a couple of specific takeaways for our typical listeners, if there is such a thing, people who may not be in the world of academia, they may not be, you know, trained in higher level scholarship of apologetics, but what are two or three things you'd want typical Christian listeners to come away with from you? If they're not able to take a course from you and apologetics, what do you want them to hear?

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Let Ike go first on that one.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: I'd like to challenge Christians to read the newspaper and interpret it by the Bible. This is something that has, of course been a theme in Christian scholarship for a long time. I think Carl Bard is attributed with saying the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other, but, and maybe I'm a Luddite for saying the word newspaper in this digital age.

Dr. Don Payne: You're assuming people know what that is?

Dr. Ike Shepardson: That's right. Yeah. As you scroll your newsfeed, right. But thinking biblically, and this is exactly what we teach at Denver Seminary in all disciplines. So that you're, you're able to interpret what you're reading based on theological categories, biblical categories. So that as I see a politician behaving in a way that I find undesirable, I'm able to say, why I'm I need to make sure I pray for those in power. And I need to oppose pride that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. And I need to offer good reasons for the hope that I have, which is not based on this present age, but which is based on the kingdom of our God and Christ. To think biblically as you're interpreting the world around you, so that

we're not overcome by fear, but we actually have a message that can bring hope to everybody that we talk to. And that's exactly what apologetics is trying to do. I always think about apologetics as if there's a roadway between the loved one that I know who is far from God and Jesus, and I want to lovingly remove the roadblocks on that roadway so that they can make their way to Jesus. If I think biblically, I can show them what the roadblock is, what it means, and show them that it's very easily removed by good arguments by prayer and participating in Christian community, but taking the steps towards Christ and you have to do that by thinking biblically, it helps to interpret the world around you.

Dr. Don Payne: And you have to understand that world around you, in order to enhance the newspaper.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: That's why you have to scroll meaningfully and good news sources. And even when you hear, you know, news that is contradictory or, or problematic, and people are going back and forth about what what's fake news. And what's the actual facts at hand being able to, to be wise, to be as, as shrewd as serpents, but as innocent as doves, you have to be shrewd in receiving these things, but looking at it with the innocence that of Christ that's so pure that, you know, God's not stressed by what's happening right now. God's not stressed out by that. Of course he's concerned, of course, he's acting, he's moving, but he's not stressed. That's because he understands what's going on in the world. And if we can get those, those theological lenses on, be deep in the scriptures, then we won't be stressed and we can show people, Hey, here's what this means. It means that God's redeeming the earth, that God's bringing hope again.

Dr. Don Payne: Good word. Doug, what do you want to leave us with?

Dr. Doug Groothuis: Yeah. Well, I'm encouraged that we're really living in a period that shows a Renaissance in apologetics. And the last, let's say 40 years, we've seen a Renaissance of Christians in philosophy and making tremendous strides there. People like Alvin Plantinga and Walter [inaudible] Craig. So many others. Well, thank you so much. I'm not that old, but we've also seen a Renaissance in apologetics, which is really taking good philosophy, religion, and using it directly to defend the Gospel and to equip people in the church. So we've seen a number of ministries develop at every level. You've got something like mama-bear apologetics, which is apologetics for moms to help their children defend the faith. And we've got our master's degree in apologetics and ethics here at Denver Seminary. There are other programs springing up around, there are podcasts, there are radio programs. And so we're really living in the grand age of Christian apologetics in the United States, very different than let's say 25, 30 years ago. So there's no excuse to not develop a reason for the hope that is within you. You can go online, you can study, you can find good arguments for God's existence, from science historical arguments, for the reliability of scripture, the resurrection here at Denver seminary. We have one of the greatest scholars in the world on the reliability of the New Testament, Dr. Craig Blomberg. So my word is avail yourself of the resources avail available and take

it to the streets. Don't be bashful, have a reason for the hope that is within you and offer it with gentleness and respect and with courage in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Don Payne: Well said, Doug. Yeah, we do live in an amazingly well-resourced place in time, which in light of some of the stress or the many downers, like I mentioned, that's a really hopeful word that the Lord has resourced us as well as he has for these ministries. Gentlemen, thanks. It's been a privilege to spend some time with you always enjoy it. You know, this conversation is really timely because we are right on the verge of offering a resource that I hope many of you will access. Dr. Doug Groothuis is going to be offering a free apologetics course. You can sign up for it through our website. There's about 25 hours of instruction broken up into five week segments, though you can do this at your own pace. The course is entitled. Be Prepared to Give an Answer, and this will be a crash course in Doug Groothuis. So you don't want to miss this. It's free. At the end of it, you'll get a little certificate of some sorts certificate of completion, and we really would encourage you to consider doing this and spread the word, take advantage have your friends take advantage of this as well. Want to put in a plug for the master of arts and apologetics and ethics that Doug and Ike both mentioned a few times and check that out on our webpage, Denverseminary.edu, and see if maybe the Lord is calling you towards some more advanced training in apologetics and ethics. I mentioned also that Doug has a second edition of Christian Apologetics forthcoming sometime in the next year or so. And you may also want to look for Ike's book, which is entitled, Who's Afraid of the Unmoved Mover, published last year by Pickwick. So check that out. That was a, I think, a published version of your dissertation at Toronto. Was it not?

Dr. Ike Shepardson: That's right. Yeah. It's the dissertation I wrote studying under the atheist Don Wiebe.

Dr. Don Payne: Wow. Well, what an apologetic maneuver that was.

Dr. Ike Shepardson: I'll mention one other thing. Of course, the Master of Divinity also has an apologetics concentration. And so that's a great way for somebody who senses the calling towards pastoral ministry and wants to have an apologetic edge in evangelism and in equipping the saints. That's a great option as well.

Glad you thought to mention that Ike, thanks. Well, thanks again to all of you for spending a little bit of time with us. And we want to give a particular shout out this week to Maritsa Smith. She's a member of our production team, and she does an enormous amount of work behind the scenes to make this thing happen. So want to thank Maritsa specifically this week for all she does. Krista Ebert is again on the boards for us, does our editing thanks to her and the rest of our production team and to all of our supporters here at Denver Seminary who do so much to make this happen. This is Engage 360, and we hope that you will take some time to give us a rating or a review on your favorite podcast platform. Communicate with us if you would like through our email address,

which is podcast@denverseminary.edu. We'd love to hear from you. Until next week. I'm Don Payne. And thank you again. Take care.