

Introduction: Welcome to *Engage360*, 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: Friends, welcome again, to *Engage360* at Denver Seminary. We're really glad and grateful you've chosen to spend a little bit of time with us. I'm Don Payne, your host, and glad to be joined again by our president Dr. Mark Young. Mark, welcome back.

Dr. Mark Young: Hey, thanks, Don. Great to be back.

Dr. Don Payne: You can tell a lot about the state of just about any enterprise by looking at two things, looking at the interplay between two things. One, what is going on in the field of that enterprise, and then what's going on in the educational and formation entities that support that enterprise. That's true with law, medicine, engineering, just about any field of endeavor that's changing and growing. You look at what's going on in the trenches, what's going on the shelf and that's gonna reflect what's going on in the R&D or the research labs that support that, and then vice versa. And the same thing is true with this world. We live in what's called theological education or seminary education, and really glad that Mark is here to visit it with us this episode about a new book he has coming out in January from Eerdmans called, "The Hope of the Gospel." Now this book is one in a series of currently I think, seven books, but ultimately to be about 12 books on the future of theological education. Now, whether or not that is your nerd-fest of choice, this still has I what would I say, deep and long running tentacles of influence in the state and the health of the church.

And if you're a believer in Jesus, a follower of Jesus, you ought to have a vested interest in that. So, we're gonna talk a little bit about Mark's new book, what that represents, where that came from, and what kinds of things we in the world of theological education, as well as those in the trenches of ministry, need to be thinking about in the way forward. I'm gonna be just disgustingly trite and cliché here, and talk about the rapid pace of change in our world. Everybody talks about that. Okay. At the same time, in the last five years, even the last two years, we've witnessed exponential rates of change and types of change that are continuing to dizzy us in a lot of ways. And we're trying to think ahead of what the challenges of ministry are gonna be going forward. And how do we need to be thinking about what it means to prepare people to go into those ministries? So, Mark, tell us a little bit about the history, the backdrop of this book, "The Hope of the Gospel," and then we can get into what your argument is, what you're talking about in the book.

Dr. Mark Young: Okay. Thanks Don. A few years back, the Lilly Foundation gave Ted Smith, faculty member at Candler Theological Seminary a grant to explore what is the future of theological education across the spectrum of both Protestant and Catholic schools. That grant was called Theological Education Between the Times. And so, what Ted did is gather 12 of us who are practitioners and scholars. And for a period of three years, we met together at least three times a

year to look at how the changing context of ministry affect the way we think about and the way we ultimately do theological education. And so, we had wonderful fellowship across boundaries that typically we wouldn't cross, people that I would never have naturally interacted with in my circles, now sitting around tables sharing concerns, sharing common values, sharing fears, anxieties about what we're facing as theological educators. And more importantly, what kind of context the church is finding itself across these traditional denominational lines.

So, each of us all 12 of us is writing a book about the concerns that we bring from our particular perspectives. In the group that four of us would come from schools that were traditionally known as evangelical schools or serve evangelical constituents. And then five to six came from mainline Protestant schools. And then the rest were from Roman Catholic schools. And I would say to you that some of the richest fellowship in Christ, some of the richest conversation that I've had as an educator and some of the deepest theological conversations I've had in a long time happened around that table with that group of people. Whom I came to love as friends and as colleagues. So I'm thankful to the Lilly Foundation for allowing us to get together and work on these books.

Dr. Don Payne: Now, the thread line in these series of books is something like the future of theological education?

Dr. Mark Young: That's right. Between the times. Ted intentionally chose that because we want to take stock of our history and see that history as important in understanding our present and shaping our future. And I would say to you that for me, writing this book forced me to come to grips with the history of our movement in a way that I never had been asked to do or never unfortunately saw the need to do. And it brought up for me a stark realization that for many of us in evangelicalism, we don't know our history, and therefore we don't know how we are shaped by that history today. And frankly, we don't know how that history might carry us into the future if some significant changes aren't made. So in some ways this book was me trying to figure out how the history of our movement is shaping what we are experiencing today as evangelicals. And as I said, it was not just cathartic, but in some ways it was convicting as well as hopeful.

Dr. Don Payne: You've written this book from both a vantage point and with an eye toward this big, what's often called a big tent of evangelicalism. And many of us probably know better than ever now that that word gets used, if not sometimes hijacked, in lots and lots of different ways. So one of the things I appreciated about your book is that you're trying to reground this terminology and the movement that we would connote by this terminology in its history, in its theological values, even in the things that the movement has kind of learned along the way through several centuries. And so we've got what could be a really long conversation because there's a lot of talking points here, but why don't you give us a bit of an overview of what you try to do in this book?

Dr. Mark Young: Okay, thanks. Well, let me also say that this book emerged from a personal crisis of whether or not evangelicalism was meaningful at all as a term I would argue. And I do say in the book that the way evangelical as an adjective and evangelicalism as a noun are used in the broader culture has very little in common with our theological commitment commitments. In other words, the terms have been so co-opted by ourselves, by us as well as by the broader society, to mean little more than conservative Republican, that many people question, whether they're worth even keeping. And I am honest in the book, I think that public uncritical support by very popular, widely disseminated voices in evangelicalism for Donald Trump in 2015, 2016, all the way through the 2020 election, has created a crisis that I'm not sure we will survive in terms of a coherent identity as a movement. Because in that uncritical support for that candidate. And really the point is not support. It's the uncritical support.

Dr. Don Payne: Uncritical. Yeah. I was gonna highlight that, it's the uncritical support.

Dr. Mark Young: That's right. We surrendered our profile as a movement characterized by truth, as a movement characterized by virtue, as a movement characterized by character. And so if that is the case and I believe it is, I think we are facing an identity crisis that rivals the identity crisis of the movement in the 1920s through the scopes trial, our credibility and the credibility of the message we claim centers us is in dire straits. So the question is what's the way forward, how did we get here? And is there a way forward and specifically what role does theological education play in helping us plot a way forward?

Dr. Don Payne: Do you want to walk us through maybe a couple of the really high points in that history that you think were defining points that anybody who would align themselves particularly theologically with evangelicalism? What are some of those defining points that anybody ought to be aware of in our history?

Dr. Mark Young: Yeah. Well, let me first say, I'm not a professional historian, right? So you have to hear this as a bit of a populist history perhaps, or at least an amateur historian's history. But I think the best way to understand our movement is to see it as a reactionary movement at five critical junctures, there were reactions against what was the dominant religious expression and understanding. And I think those five reactions helped provide a nice framework for understanding how evangelicalism developed to what it is today. So the first of course, is the reformation where Luther and others began to react against medieval Catholicism, and reclaim in their mind what was the true Gospel and make that the centerpiece. It's important for us to remember that evangelical as a word comes to us through German, which comes then from Greek. And Evangaylasha in German was essentially the word that was used to describe Protestantism. So all Protestants at one point were evangelicals in that sense.

Then I think we see a reaction against state church Protestantism that we began to see emerging in Scotland, as well as in the continental Europe. And from that we see the Puritan and the Pionists streams of Protestant thought emerge. And it's easy to caricature and stereotype the two, but in general, you can say that

one stream was much more intent on solidifying the theological foundations, much more given to that type of value. And the other began to emphasize more theological experience or spiritual experience. Now both emphasized both, but there was, I think, a trend to see those two streams emphasizing both the mind and the heart, if you want to say it.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. The Puritans and the Pionists, respectively.

Dr. Mark Young: Right. And then you see a reaction to colonial religion in the United States, colonial Protestantism in the great revivals. So I have a chapter of the book called Revive Us Again, and at its core, contemporary evangelicalism is revivalist religion.

Dr. Don Payne: That's probably particularly true in the US. Wouldn't you say?

Dr. Mark Young: And that's where we're focused at this point in the US. Right? So, and by that, I mean, the essence of evangelicalism is a religious conversion experience. And what's interesting is that through the great revivals and the emphasis on preaching and bringing to a point of decision for Jesus, we really create the possibility of a church-less Christianity, right. Because Salvation occurs at the revival. And then if you look at, if you're willing to take a look at that and move forward, that trend is very much a part of what evangelicalism purports or is sociologically as we come even into our current situation. I'm not sure we've ever really figured out our ecclesiology, what the church is in evangelical thought. Then the next big reaction, I would say that shapes the movement today is that reaction that occurs in the early 20th century when evangelicalism up until the end of the 19th century is the dominant expression of Protestantism. But you begin to see movement apart between those who adopt a more scientific, critical approach to scripture, those who value science and technology in a more optimistic view of the future, modernism. As well as an influx of Roman Catholic immigrants, that begin to really challenge Protestantism as the dominant religious presence.

And those who react against that and become much more outspoken. And even, I would say Pundulistic in their adherence to the great fundamentals of the faith, right? So evangelicalism, which really, you could say almost all Christianity in the US had been up until that point splits into what we now know as mainline liberal Protestantism and Fundamentalism with the publishing of The Great Fundamentals. Well, that then creates another reactions a few years later, when a group of people who the fundamentalists called Neoevangelicals say, "we want to be engaged in the political and social world and the intellectual life of the nation." And we want to do that in a winsome way. We don't want to stand apart and just yell. We want to hold onto the fundamentals, but we want to engage the world. And frankly, evangelicalism as a religious identity, really gains popularity again through the work of Billy Graham and his renown. And that really is I think the foundation historically that brings us into even the, a current scenario. Now, obviously there are lots of other events, there are lots of other

personalities, some of whom are honorable, some of whom aren't, with different motives.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, how does this begin to affect what we are thinking about theological education? And so from your vantage point as a seminary president and your years of work with one of our accrediting agencies, the Association of Theological Schools, what is it about theological education that is most at risk or not working?

Dr. Mark Young: Well, I think that the challenge Don, is that we as insiders want to define ourselves theologically, but the historical record defines us differently. I think you could argue that in evangelicalism, it is in fact, some of the undergirding beliefs that we say are important to a us, that have actually led us to this point of crisis. The way we think about the Bible, the way we think about the cross, the way we think about conversion, the way we think about activism or mission. I'm going to argue has actually stripped away some of that nuanced, theological understanding that really develops or only develops informally. I'm gonna say it, in depth, theological education and to the degree that our movement is still led primarily by those with no formal theological education. We've seen the outcome of that in the movements loss of identity admission.

Dr. Don Payne: Now you're referring, some listeners will be aware of this, but for those who are not, you're referring to what we would call a taxonomy, that was given to us by the English. I'm not sure what he was, a sociologist or a theologian, David Bebbington? Some, a few decades back where he defined evangelicalism in terms of its commitment to, he used those words, Biblicism, crucicentrism or the centrality of the cross, conversionism, and then activism. Those were his four pillars in Bebbington's. Bebbington's outline has been used very widely to help us reflect on ourselves as a movement. And what I appreciate about your work is that you really give some extended attention to each of those and take a look at what they, at their core intended to mean. And then where they've either maybe gone off the rails or not gone, or they've gotten stuck somewhere. And then you talk a bit about what's needed to kind of give a reboot or a reset in each of those. Maybe we want to touch on each of those and walk a little bit through your analysis of kind of where we're stuck, what those are intended to be and, and where are some of the ways or what are some of the ways in which we need to kind of bump start, kick start those and think differently about them? So, what about, Biblicism - our commitment to biblical authority?

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Let's, let's start there because we always do. Yeah. And I think you could say that in evangelicalism for some people Biblicism seems to be more important than Christology, right? Or Bibliology seems to be more important than Christology. So, the essence of Biblicism is simply what we all sang in Sunday school that B I B L E, yes that's the book for me. I stand alone on the word of God, the B I B L E. Right. And so you know, I think for us not backing away from the idea that the Bible is our guide for faith and practice. It's the authority under which we live for faith and practice is something that evangelicals have to hold onto. The problem we face in the way we've exercised

Biblicism I summarized in a sentence where I say, we read the Bible too simplistically, we interpret the Bible too arrogantly, and we apply the Bible too selectively. Basically what has happened in our movement is we have elevated the, the possibility of choosing and picking scriptures and then reading into them what we want, so that can justify the behaviors that we want.

And the perfect illustration of that is the Civil War. And the question of slavery. Mark Noll's book, *The Civil War Theological Crisis*, is a wonderful and very convicting expose of how Biblicism as we practiced, it led two camps of evangelicals to come to two very different conclusions. One of which was the Bible prohibits slavery, chattel slavery, the other on the basis of some biblical texts that the Bible not only permits it, but sanctions it. That division, that ability of people both honoring the Bible coming to two radically and dramatically different conclusions about an issue that important for humanity, demonstrates just how deficient our Biblicism has been. Our approach to understanding what scripture is and how we interpret it.

Dr. Don Payne: You have a statement when you're talking about the Biblicism, the sort of simplistic narrow and arrogant, I think those were your three adjectives, right? When you're talking about how those particular ways of reading the Bible have, have positioned us for the kind of riffs that we're seeing today. I picked up on this statement, you say Biblicism leaves little middle ground for common cause between those who read a text differently. So what is the unique contribution of theological education to this particular dilemma?

Dr. Mark Young: Yeah, so I would argue that in theological education, we have the privilege, first of all, to back away from the text and say, just what is the Bible? And help people understand that the Bible isn't just a guidebook, isn't just a collection of tips on how to live, it's the one true story of the one true God. And his engagement in human history, redemptively. So first reading that Bible, reading the Bible, understanding it as it's written, as the story and placing it as the book that tells us the story of God's intervention. Secondly, informal theological education. We have the privilege now to understand how those texts are constructed those individual texts in what contexts they are constructed. How the sociological, how the grammatical and syntactical, how the human dimension of scripture comes together to give us the Bible that we read today. And then thirdly, we have the privilege to say, based on that understanding contextually, we now have an obligation to assess our context and not just say the Bible says this, I'm gonna do exactly that because every time we do that once, there are 10 times, we don't do that.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Right. The Bible says a whole lot of things we don't do.

Dr. Mark Young: Exactly. Way more than we do. Right? So the point is then that formal theological education gives us the framework whereby we can step back, look at our contexts, look at that context, understand the purpose for which those commands and directives are given and ask, what were they meant to accomplish in the great redemptive story of God. And then step back into our

world and say, how do we accomplish that today? That kind of nuance thinking, to be honest with you, Don is something that we in the mission community have done for generations, but in the context where we grow up, reading the Bible and hearing it preached a certain way, one way, this is right, this is wrong, we don't do that type of contextual analysis. And in the process, we fly over 2000 years of church history. Yeah. And don't even take into consideration how our reading of a text has been shaped by the reading of that text and the teaching of it for 2000 years of biblical preachers and theologians and thinkers.

Dr. Don Payne: You're reminding me of comments that I've heard through the years, kind of a pushback set of comments where people will say to, to people like you and me, you're making, reading the Bible so complicated. You almost make it inaccessible. And I've puzzled over that because certainly none of us want to do that. The word of God is powerful. It is God's word. And one of the responses I've generated to that type of resistance that we make the Bible so complicated with all of this is that we're not talking about repairing a refrigerator. We're talking about human persons. I mean, what is more complex than the human person and the one true almighty God and the interaction, the relationship between exactly that and the restoration of relationship between that God and these person, what could be more complex than that? That deserves our... here I'm preaching, you're the podcast guest, not me, but I'm going off here. You know, I mean that does that not deserve our deepest and most nuanced thinking in order to be faithful to that?

Dr. Mark Young: I would hope so. And take it a step further. If you're gonna stand in front of a congregation and say, this is the word of the Lord, and this is what it means in your life today, you better know what you're talking about.

Dr. Don Payne: And you better have given some deep and considered thought to that.

Dr. Mark Young: Exactly. You know, it's interesting at the time of the reformation a lot of those in the Catholic hierarchy were horrified by the thought that individuals could read the Bible and understand what it meant on their own. And there's a sense in which we react against that, right? Because the reformation was about making scripture available in languages. And I'm fully, obviously in favor of that, evangelicals have been at the forefront of making the Bible accessible. But at the end of the day, when we think about where our movement has moved, in some regards, we have basically given papal authority to every preacher that steps into a pulpit, because they're the ones that this is what the word of God means. So if we're going to, as a movement, see that kind of authority and the preaching of God's word, then I want to sit and listen to somebody who has studied the scripture deeply, understands the nuances of the text and the story, understands the contexts in which it was written, and in which we live. That's why I would argue that one of the great hindrances to evangelicalism becoming more vibrant in our culture is the lack of trained preachers. The lack of those who get up and say, this is what the word of God says. And to be perfectly frank, they don't have that nuanced understanding.

Dr. Don Payne: In many cases probably have neither done their homework nor had the skills and the tools to do that homework.

Dr. Mark Young: That's right. And then you magnify that by the fact that again, we have a whole sector of evangelicalism that thinks it's just about me and God, and I'm gonna read the Bible and whatever God tells me that today, then that's the truth for everyone. And so you have this kind of it's, it's almost hard to imagine the boiling and the stirring within the people of all the different things God allegedly is saying to us that often leads to two very different understandings or four or five or 10 different understandings of what God can do.

Dr. Don Payne: And just sometimes crazy and damaging things. Tragically. Mark, we may not have time to go through each of these markers of evangelicalism, but I'd love to hear your thoughts about conversionism. What is it about that, that should prompt us to think more deeply than we typically have as evangelicals?

Dr. Mark Young: It is interesting when you go back and look at Bebbington's work, and by the way, he's a historian of the church. And his book originally was written about 19th, 18<sup>th</sup>-19th, century evangelicalism in the UK. But conversionism is the first of the traits that he mentions. And I think that's wise. So from a perspective of American evangelicalism and one who's theologically trained, we want to go Bible, because that's a source of truth. Cross, that's salvation. Conversion. That's how I experience it. And mission, that's how I live it out. But I think what Bebbington's captured by making that first in the list is that the one common element that we might be able to point to in evangelicalism is we all have a conversion story. We all believe that we've been born again. We've been made new and that our life is different because we've met Jesus. And you know, the great thing is like when I was a kid, we had revivals twice a year and I got saved all the time.

Dr. Don Payne: You met Jesus a lot.

Dr. Mark Young: I did. I mean, and every time I went, I was convicted of my sin and I needed to go forward and be saved. And of course, you know, my church wouldn't have purported that theologically, but that's what it felt like. Right. I just wanted to walk with God. I wanted to know God. And most importantly, I wanted to know my sins were forgiven. So the classic revivalist conception of conversion is really one thing. Your sins are forgiven and you're going to heaven. So conversion becomes a siloed transaction between you and God personally that secures your future in heaven because of what Christ did on the cross. And that's true. All true. But I think there's a much deeper even, you like this phrase, thicker understanding of conversion that talks about not just what my, how my future is different, but that as someone who has now taken on a whole identity, not just spiritually, but socially and personally, that needs to express itself in a very different way of life. Now I argue that conversionism that's cut off from the church denudes the concept of conversion and takes away that understanding of conversion as the creation of a new identity. That new identity needs to be

wrapped up as a part of and understanding and seeing ourselves as the very presence of God, as the church.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. New people, both a new person and a new people.

Dr. Mark Young: There you go. So here's the way it works out. We don't think of conversion that way. So we substitute other identities and make them preeminent above our identity as the people of God. So what are those identities? I'm an American, I'm a Republican or a Democrat or whatever. And so the lack of an understanding of conversion, making me something new and distinct from all other identities on this planet, allows us to seek out and elevate other identities to the place that ought to be occupied by "I'm a child of God. We are the people of God. I'm a member of that people." People that exist to live out the very presence of God, not to make sure the Supreme court is packed or the right people get elected to office.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, that strikes me as a focus on a new destiny without focusing on a new identity or it's limiting the focal point of conversion to destiny without expanding what it means for all things, quite literally to be made new. That's the new identity.

Dr. Mark Young: And I think that's where Crucicentrism becomes so important. Because again, if we think of Crucicentrism only in atonement language and I've believe in atonement language, right. Our sins are paid for, the blood is shed. Our sins are forgiven, but Crucicentrism is also the establishment of Kingdom, right? So conversion is ushering us into an identity as the very presence of God on the earth, the outworking, the beginning, the seeds of the very kingdom of God. So those two, I see as very tightly tied together.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. And that obviously, and rather instantaneously affects our understanding of the Gospel. The euangelian, the good news at the core of the root evangelical. It both, both thickens, you picked up on my favorite word there, you, it both thickens and it extends or expands our understanding of what it means to be people of the Gospel and the implications.

Dr. Mark Young: That's right. So, you know, think, think back with me, if we think of evangelicalism as a revivalist populous movement, and we think of Biblicism, you know, our focal point of what's right and wrong is something in the past. That leads to this value of conservatism, because we want to conserve what was, and there's all good. There's lots of good things there. But then you translate that into a diminished view of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, a diminished view of conversion. And then ultimately I would say a diminished view of mission and all of a sudden, where are you gonna go? You don't have another option that's deep in your heart other than, well, I'm gonna hook into conservative politics because I'm a conservative by values. And by the way, I'm a conservative by values. And I'm saved and I'm trying to live a holy life. And I kind of, you know, I do it on and off and I go to Bible study and I sit and I confess and everything's good. I'm going to heaven. But man, the world around me is not

doing so great. So where's my hope, what am I gonna do? Well, I'm gonna latch onto what looks like a solution to a world that is not where I think it ought to be or not where even the scripture says it shouldn't be. I'm gonna latch onto an identity and a solution that in my opinion, is just a mockery of what we are actually called to be as the people of God who are living out the presence of God and creating the seed, a smell and aroma, a taste, a whisper of what God ultimately will do in the restoration of all things.

Dr. Don Payne: That's exciting. So as you think about theological education, the world of seminary, how do you think this calls us to be different in the generation we're moving into?

Dr. Mark Young: Yeah. I think a lot of the conversation and theological education is around methods, right? Do we educate a person on campus or online, or do we use this kind of teaching technology or whatever and all that's really good and we all have to pay attention to it. But I think we need to rethink the very essence of the theological underpinnings of the theological curriculum. What is it that our students are actually leaving with? What convictions theologically are they leaving our studies with and moving into ministry. And I would argue that in the academy is the best place in the theological schools. We have best place to have these tough conversations about these core theological commitments that have in my view become much thinner, much more shrill and less dynamic and effective than they could be in the lives of God's people.

Dr. Don Payne: Who do you want to see Denver Seminary be? What do you think that'll look like here? What would you hope for that to look like here?

Dr. Mark Young: I want us to lead the conversation. I want us to be able to say, we need to rethink what we believe about the Bible, how we interpret the Bible. We need to hold onto our Bibliology. I'm not saying that at all, but we need to rethink how we think about and how we interpret and especially how we apply the Bible. We need to rethink what we teach about the cross and understand it as cosmic significance, as well as its personal significance. We need to rethink what it means to know Christ and that what that identity means in the broader society as well personally. And we need to, we need to think, where's our voice? What do we do in terms of making the gospel a presence that people want to believe? I want us to have those conversations and I want our curriculum to reflect and our learning outcome and what we're reading to reflect those conversations afresh. And quite frankly, I think we're beautifully positioned for that at Denver Seminary, because we aren't just beholden to any one tradition of evangelical or Protestant theology. We have a community of people who come from different backgrounds with different expertise, with different understandings. We have the privilege to dive into those deeper conversations because nobody's looking over our shoulder and saying, oh, that's not Calvinistic enough. Or that's not Pionistic enough. Right. We're helping us understand then the rich tapestry of evangelical theological history, how we craft deeper and richer understandings today so that the Gospel is more credible and compelling to our broader society. Yeah. I get excited about it.

Dr. Don Payne:

You do. Mark. Thanks. And friends if you want to hear more about that, want to learn more about at, we'd encourage you to connect with our website. You can find lots of different ways in which we are already trying to work this out at Denver Seminary. And if you know somebody, including yourself, who may want to spend some time studying with us whether online or here in Littleton or in Washington, DC, get in touch with us. We'd love to talk with you about how these conversations, this type of conversation can be part of what God is doing in your life to move you forward into the world, part of the mission of God. Mark's book coming out in January is *The Hope of the Gospel*, by Eerdmans. You need to get yourself a copy of that. And we would love to interact with you about that. You can email us [podcast@denverseminary.edu](mailto:podcast@denverseminary.edu) is our email address. Grateful to many of you pray for us who, who support us in one way or another and hope that the Lord gets you excited about what it means to be part of God's mission, truly biblically, moving into these coming years. Friends, I'm Don Payne. You are listening to Engage 360 and we look forward to having another conversation with you really soon. Take care.