Ed Stetzer

Part 1 of 2: The State of Evangelicalism
with
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Dr. Ed Stetzer: It's an honor to be here.

Dr. Darrell Bock: It's a pleasure to have you, the honorable Ed Stetzer from Nashville, Tennessee.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Yes. Yes.

Dr. Darrell Bock: And LifeWay Publishing and Christianity Today and you know what else can we put into the mix?

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Motivational speaker living in a van down by the river.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That sounds exciting. It sounds like you're real successful.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: I'm enjoying it.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That's right. Well, our topic is – we're going to continue our discussion from earlier today for those of you who weren't with us earlier today, Ed went through some statistics that he said that some people use to portray the collapse of – the coming collapse of evangelicalism. And argued that those statistics actually don't represent the reality of what we are experiencing.

So we're going to pick up that discussion now and in particular I want to talk about kind of where we are and where we're going in evangelicalism. You mentioned the Bebington definition of evangelicalism. So it might be good – most people probably on seminary campuses are aware of that definition. But it probably wouldn't be a bad idea to go through that for people who say, "Well, what is evangelicalism allegedly anyway?"

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Yeah.

Dr. Darrell Bock: So let's start there. Let's start with the definition of what evangelicalism is.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Well, you know that's one definition of course. It's not the only definition. And I think it's probably necessary, because of what we talked about earlier. You know Joel Osteen, Brian McLaren, John MacArthur or Rachel Held Evans for that matter, has become a prominent blogger and writer.
Dr. Darrell Bock: Now you're really outside the evangelical trinity, and I'm getting nervous.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Yes, that's true. That's true. But I would say Rachel Held Evans has said she's an evangelical.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Right.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: And so what does that look like. Well Bebbington, if you go back to when years ago people said an evangelical was someone who likes Billy Graham. Or was sort of for Billy Graham. And what would that tell you if you're for Billy Graham you're a conversionist. That's really important. And so the Billy Graham connection was really helpful, because conversionism is not held broadly outside of evangelicalism.

So for example main line Protestantism you tend not to have a strict conversionism. They don't say, "Well, you're 11. Have you received Christ?" So that's kind of an evangelical process if you will or focus.

So what Bebbington said was –

Dr. Darrell Bock: Rumor has it that John 1 did talk about receiving Christ.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Yeah, and I would say I mean you're a New Testament scholar, so I don't want to toy with you.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Yeah.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: But I would also say that that verse has been interpreted many, many different ways. Many as receive it –

Dr. Darrell Bock: Yeah, don't mess with Texas.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Did you say Texas? Are you going to go George Bush on me? Don't mess can Texas.
So the Bebbington quadrilateral, so four things they saw biblicism, high regard for the bible. Some would say inerrancy. Dallas is an inerrantist institution, right?

*Dr. Darrell Bock* That's correct.

*Dr. Ed Stetzer* Okay, and so inerrancy, but outside of that, evangelicals would include people who are in infallibility or inspirationists.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* High regard for scripture.

*Dr. Ed Stetzer* High regard for scripture, so biblicism, crucicentrism, so the atoning work of Christ on the cross, his death on the cross for our sin in our place. Conversionism, that's the Billy Graham question. You need to be born again.

So a perfect example for this would be, I mentioned George Bush a minute ago. George Bush, senior H.W. Bush was a mainline Protestant. So one of the awkward moments was I asked him are you born again? And he said, "Well, I'm Episcopal. I've been Episcopalian all my life." But there wasn't that answer when you asked George Bush that question or Barak Obama that question. There are conversion stories that articulated in both of those cases.

So conversionism is – that's why George W. Bush is also considered an evangelical where his father was not, using Texas examples. And then activism; the belief that the gospel is somehow shared or expressed or lived the implications or lived out.

So that's as good a definition probably as many. There's different ways to define it. So sometimes you just ask people. Are you an evangelical? I was talking to Rodney Stark a few weeks ago at – he's at Baylor now, but very world-renowned sociologist. And he said, "That's the best definition. If you ask people then if they say, yes, they are." He says, "It's like asking a democrat are you a democrat? They say yes, you count them as a democrat."
So there's some validity in that. But also a lot of people are inactive evangelicals. So there's – but then there's beliefs. So some organizations have created belief constructs that say this makes it evangelical. There's actually what we call – I mentioned earlier the rel tread construct, which is a research construct sits over top of the GSS. So there is a lot of different ways to do that. And the rel tread really bases on do they go to evangelical denomination.

So over here I met some folks who are ACNA. The Anglican Church of North America. Their pastor is a friend of mine. And I work a lot with the ACNA. Arch Bishop Duncan before. But so in ACNA they would be decidedly evangelical. More than evangelical, but they're evangelical. But then the Episcopal Church which is really from, which they came out of would not be.

So both are Anglican in their belief. One because of the biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, activism would be evangelical with some others mixed in as well. But only the evangelical one would be main line protestant. But statistically that distinction is one of the most important distinctions you have to make. Because there really is a vast statistical difference.

And I would also say that theologically it's important. You have to – and I am not one, and Darrell I don't know where you are on this, I'm not one who thinks outside of evangelicalism there is no faith, and there is no salvation. But what I would say is, I mean I'm an evangelical, because I think it most aligns with the biblical text, the teachings, the call of Jesus. But I also recognize there are genuine believers outside of the evangelical traditions. But I think you have to sort of wrestle, what does that look like? Do we evangelize people who are a part of what some people call the grand tradition?

But who are outside of evangelicalism and don't express a born again experience. Actually I tend to do that, depending upon how they would articulate that; I tend to do that. So that's a long answer to your short question. But that's sort of the definition people often use.
Dr. Darrell Bock: Well, let's talk about another element that's important to evangelicalism and looking a little bit back as well as thinking about the present. You did talk this morning a little bit about the contrast of the fact that you can have different kinds of people labeled as evangelicals and the spectrum that you used was John MacArthur who probably represents the right end of that spectrum.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: I would say, yes. There is some room to the right of John MacArthur. Just not a lot.

Dr. Darrell Bock: I'm glad you made that clear.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: There is some. I met the guy. Yeah.

Dr. Darrell Bock: And then Brian McLaren, who probably represents the other end of the spectrum.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: I would not consider him Brian McLaren evangelical. I'm just saying people time magazine listed him as evangelical. I think Brian McLaren has jettisoned out of evangelicalism.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That's probably fair.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: And so I would — I think he was an evangelical. But so was Doug Pagitt who the youth pastor for Leith Anderson at Wooddale Church and now Leith is the President of the National Association of Evangelicals and Doug wouldn't consider himself at all evangelical. He's a friend of mine, but he's not at all evangelical.

Dr. Darrell Bock: And Joel Osteen was the third example that you used who knows where he fits?

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Well, I think you got to say that Osteen, though I think a lot of us would have theological — we want to address some things. I think Osteen is largely seen as probably a key evangelical leader in the United States today. But he's sort of an outlier. Every generation has an outlier like this. Norman Vincent Peel of three generations ago. Robert Schuler two generations ago. Joel Osteen this generation. They tend to be seen in some ways as evangelicals, of course both Norman Vincent Peel and Robert Schuler were part of the RCA or the CRC, which are sort of evangelical friendly denominations but are more main line.
But yeah, so Osteen is in a category about himself both by his influence, but also by – I mean he don't express enough theology to know where exactly to place him on a theological – well, I don't mean that in a mean sense. I mean I'm not – I mean it's obvious – I'm kind of a Bible thumping preacher. So I'm not – I come from a different realm but I have friends who are friends with Joel and if you look at the documents at that church it wouldn't look dissimilar to the documents at my church. It's just more of a public expression of what that looks like.

Or I shouldn't just say my church. "Oh, your church." It wouldn't look very different than your church either. But it gets that public expression is just different. That's probably what a lot of us define Joel Osteen by.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  
Well, one of the things that I think evangelicalism used to be defined by in part and you alluded to this already is someone who is for Billy Graham one way or another. There was a visible central figure who kind of was like a magnet for the movement in a centralizing force, a place to land and identify. I think it would be fair to say that we don't have anything like that today.

*Dr. Ed Stetzer*  
I agree.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  
That there is no central figure who says – who you look at and you go, that represents kind of what evangelicalism is all about. And one of the things that's happening – you mentioned this earlier today too – you talked about being more a center person than a border person, which I take to mean that you have a sense of when someone is evangelical but defining where its borders are and when you cross the line is a harder business.

*Dr. Ed Stetzer*  
It's harder.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  
And that's why the Bebbington definition is so important in understanding what evangelicalism is.
But I would say if you're borderless – see there's a tricky reality right now is that people want to be defined as an evangelical. I think I might have mentioned this earlier, either in our conversation in your office or not here. People want to be defined as an evangelical, because if you can say I'm an evangelical who is just speaking to other evangelicals about their need to change. I did mention that earlier, so I think there has to be a sense where no, you know what, I get it. But really you're not. You're not of the – you're really not of the same faith in the sense that we have the same goals. We hold the same view of scripture. And I know that seems harsh, but ultimately everybody wants to be an evangelical, because to become a main line protestant it largely to be banished into outer nothingness. Because nobody is listening to mainline Protestants.

I mean think about it who are – we did a survey a few years ago. Who are the leading preachers in the United States, the people that are listening to the pastors listening to? So we asked all pastors and I forget who they were. Chuck Swindoll was on the list. I have to mention that, because that's important to you. I know he's like the fourth member of the trinity here. But it was Andy Stanley. I don't remember the order. Andy Stanley, Charles Stanley. It was John MacArthur. It was Chuck Swindoll. I think it was Chuck Smith. And it was devoid of any mainline protestant except Barbara Brown Taylor who is a remarkable writer and speaker in the mainline Protestant tradition.

But I think it's important that when you survey all Protestants the evangelical preachers are the one that they listen to. So those are the ones who are getting the book contracts, the book publishing deals, so if you can say you're an evangelical for as long as possible, and maybe not reveal your beliefs, but sort of hint at them, and sort of be seen as a prophet selling of evangelicals need to lighten up. I think what happens is you sort of – you become – I mean look at the emergent movement.

Yeah, that was actually where I was going with my question.
Dr. Ed Stetzer: So emergent and the emergent church, which again I was a sympathetic observer and seen as by the emergent leaders as an honest critic. And what happened is, and I actually created the first framework where people sort of talked about streams of the emerging church. It became widely used. But what happened is, so I'm for this. I'm for any kind of mission driven approach to engage culture in a fresh new way. I think it's great.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Right.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: But what happened was – I think a lot of people recognized the emergent lost its mojo. It's a technical mystological term.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That's right.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: But emergent lost its mojo when it detached from evangelicalism. It wanted to be a third way. Everyone wants to be a third way. A third way, between evangelicals and main line protestant. I mean really it just became an avant garde wing of mainline Protestantism. And then what were huge best sellers – yeah, what was Brian McLaren's last book, do you know?

Dr. Darrell Bock: I don't know what his last book was.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: But you know A New Kind of Christian?

Dr. Darrell Bock: Yeah.

Dr. Darrell Bock: But you know Everything Must Change?

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Uh huh.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Because those were the evangelical years. And so what happens is eventually in jettisoning out of evangelicals you may lose your influence, because mainline Protestantism is – I mean the evangelical is really mainline Protestantism. Evangelicalism is larger, substantially larger than mainline Protestantism today. You just don't know that, because mainline Protestants have the levers of media and power and evangelicals are on the fringe. They're not in New York City where the God box is.
The God box is a famous building in Manhattan that was actually built related to some key leaders of industry and government who said, "We're going to put a place in Manhattan," so these mainline – they didn't call them mainline. They were just the churches could be close to the center of power. Well, now they're kind of closing up the National Council of Churches is closing up, looking for a smaller place, because they just have the Episcopal Church. Katharine Jefferts Schori, who is actually a friend, but they're shrinking down the whole structure. But they still have – I mean everyone in the media knows who Katharine Jefferts Schori is who leads the – one of the fastest shrinking churches in America today.

But probably many people in the mainline media, when I talk to them last night Katie Couric tweeted – I guess it was the night before last. No, it was last night. Katie Couric tweeted, "Heard a new word in church today. Eschatology anyone?" In other words what does this mean?

And Christians responded as graciously as they always do on the internet. But I'll tell you they don't know who Chuck Swindoll is. They don't know Tim. They might know who Tim Keller is because he has engaged some of those levers of power. But I think that's part of the – it makes it look bigger than it actually is. But emergent is an organization and then eventually a movement.

It had a lot of promise. I mean Phyllis Tickle wrote a book, The Great Emergence, maybe. I can't remember the exact title. But she wrote the book and said, we've kind of talked about the emergence as this great 500 year move of the church and I kind of felt bad, because Phyllis is a great writer. But to write the book, it's called Great Emergence. To write the book saying this is it how Christianity is changing and why. This is one of the great moves – like about – it got published and then a year later it all sort of collapses. And now someone online called me an emergent the other day. And I'm like, "Is that a thing? Is that still a thing?" I mean can you even call somebody that?
So I think those are some of the shifts. So I think evangelicals and for all else false still is the – still has a center. People are trying to reclaim that center. I think again I think your evangelical manifesto was an attempt; this we believe was an attempt. The gospel coalition probably has been the most successful of the attempts as far as in prominence. But sort of hasn't rallied. Certainly Armenians, Dispensationalists, Pentecostals and others, so I don't know. I think we need another rallying point. And I think again I'll just be blunt. I think people like you Darrell and people at other schools and other institutions and other churches need to say this we believe, we're in this together. This is what evangelicalism is. And give it now face to some of the angry rhetoric that sometimes we see.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

So in your closing here suggests the next question, which is – we talked a little bit this morning about tone and winsomeness et cetera. Where do you see evangelicalism being today? You suggested it's not exactly healthy, but it's not exactly collapsing.

**Dr. Ed Stetzer**

Yeah.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

So that I guess I think you said it has a cold. So I want to know about the Kleenex. And then the second question is, what's the future of evangelicalism and as a person goes out as an evangelical in a world that itself is adjusting to all kinds of cultural change, what advice would you give in terms of how it look at the future?

**Dr. Ed Stetzer**

Let me see if I can pull up a couple of things that may help. We're in the process of doing some research. I'm on the board of the National Association of Evangelicals. And when we kind of look at what are the numbers that we're looking at here and we got a couple of graphs, I think that are helpful, if I can pull them up. I don't know if I'll be able to do it quickly enough for our conversation. But basically I think that evangelicalism as a movement had peaked in the '90's.

But I think and I really wish I could find this. It's kind of driving me nuts. But I think that it might be helpful to know that if you look at two major – Jordan Campbell is a Great Center for the Study of Global Christianity. And then there's – gosh I'm trying to remember the other research firm. But they both sort of did a look at the percentage of evangelicals and the number of evangelicals in North America. And of course Canada is slightly different, but everything is just sort of lowered in Canada – you know it's done numerically. If you look and here it is. Here it is.
So here's a couple of graphs that may help give us a picture of this. Here's Operation World Evangelicals. And if you look at, let me just zero in on Northern America. You can see that about 24 percent in 1970 were evangelicals. It went up 2010 to 26 or 27 percent and it’s projected to go down to 26.5 percent.

Now you tell me, because this is real research. The Center For The Study of Global Christianity, Christianity's global context. This is not pop stuff, so this is real research. And you tell me is a .3 percent decline from 2010 to 2020 collapse. I don't think I would say that. Now I actually prefer the definition from the World Christian Database of Evangelicals; this is Todd Johnson's work. And the reason I prefer it is it's not – this is more identification. This is like I can count you in a denomination. So it's higher. But I think it's a more accurate statistic. And if we were to use the number that I use is that of Northern American about 15.4 percent in 1970 dropped to about 13.5 in 2010. Peaked in the ’90's. And then from 2010 to 2020 about 13.4.

So pretty much stable now. So I think and again it's I can write it out if it helps, but I think that about 12 to 13 percent of the population in North America is actively convictionally evangelical. And that number has not – is not substantially declining, but has remained relatively steady for the last several decades.

Dr. Darrell Bock
And that's in contrast as you mentioned earlier today the mainline denominations. It's about like Catholics? Is that fair in terms of Catholics are also relatively steady in terms of the way –

Dr. Ed Stetzer
Now Catholics are steady in a strange way, because migration has impacted that so substantially, Latino immigration. So if you go to the Northeast we did – I recently spoke to the Juditorical leaders in the Northeast of 15 or 20 denominations. And evangelicalism, Protestantism and Catholicism have taken huge hits in the early part of the last decade partly because the scandals.

But the Latino migration has bolstered Catholics. It hasn't bolstered mainline Protestants there. And evangelicals it has.
That actually raises a whole other question when you think about the discussion of evangelicalism and one of the issues here is of course we're tucked away in what is sometimes alluded to as the buckle of the bible belt.

Dallas is the center of the evangelical universe.

I'll just pass by that statement.

Not just the city, but this school.

Yes, I know. You're doing very, very well. I'll slip you the $20 later.

Exactly.

But having said that it really does matter where you are in the country in terms of what the evangelical influence is. If you go to parts of the Northeast or parts of the Northwest you're going to find a negligible evangelical presence that's much like what you might find if you went to say Australia or New Zealand or parts of Canada. But if you go through the south or you go through parts of the Midwest than you're going to have a much larger percentage. And I think that that – we tend to talk about evangelicalism in the United States, this is kind of monolith, but it really is geographically impacted in terms of who is where.

Yeah, no question. There's a book by Frank Newport at Gallop called God is Alive and Well. It's actually again a real research in writing. A real book on research and saying you know what the real numbers show. And I interviewed him and you can actually – if you Google our names Ed Stetzer and Frank Newport you can find it. You'll see him on CNN. You'll see him on T.V. all the time.

And in that conversation we talked a little bit about the most churched state, the most evangelical church, but churched period state is actually Mississippi where there are more Baptists than people.

That's why football has been so good this year.
*The Table Podcast*  
**Ed Stetzer**

**Dr. Ed Stetzer**  
Exactly. I know nothing about sports.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
That's nice to know. I can have fun now.

**Dr. Ed Stetzer**  
Let’s talk about Boniface evangelization of the Frisians in the 8th century.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
That sounds thrilling.

**Dr. Ed Stetzer**  
Yeah, exactly. So anyways. So Mississippi whereas you go to the Northeast, Northwest is actually more churched than most people realize – it’s not by no means – it's not like the south or Texas. But it's actually the Northeast that's the bastion of secularism. And so if you go to New England let's say to New Hampshire and what's fascinating is this. Is that New Hampshire and Mississippi are polar opposites. If you move from New Hampshire to Mississippi, your religiosity – its kind of research terms – your religiosity tends to go up. If you move from Mississippi to New Hampshire it tends to go down.

So it appears the soil secularizes.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
That or the air or something.

**Dr. Ed Stetzer**  
But part of the reason is you go to Mississippi, and when you move in people say, "Where do you go to church?" Like the second question. Where did you put your kids in school? Where do you go to church? And that's not the question people ask in New Hampshire. So when you talk about the future, I think the future looks like – I wrote this in a U.S.A. Today article. They asked me to write an analysis of the Pew Forum numbers.

And if you read the column, I talk about the nuns, and you can Google that. But I think it looks like the Northwest. The future of faith in the United States, I don't think looks like Europe. Too many wars fought. I mean there's blood spilled for hundreds of years over "Christianity". But the Pacific Northwest there are – and I use the example of the four square. I work a lot with the four square church. Any four square folks here? Yeah, okay, awesome. So I probably met you somewhere along the way. No, you don't go to national meeting? Okay. I've been to three or four of the last national meetings. But good people.
But they have robust churches throughout the Northwest. And they have 160,000 water baptisms. When you're Pentecostal you have to add the word water before baptisms. It matters. It's a different kind. 160,000 water baptisms, 40 plus churches planted. And so what you see in the Pacific Northwest is the culture is sort of over it. The culture is not over it in Mississippi or Texas or Tennessee. The culture is sort of over it. But there's still a – some decent percentage of the population that's an evangelical. Churches are being planted and growing and reaching people. But the culture by and large is more secular. I think that's the future. I don't think the future is New England. I think the future is more the Northwest. I think that's what Texas will look like 50 to 100 years from now.

So what does that mean for seminary students who are graduating? We talked about this a little bit earlier today. But I want to revisit the question. What advice would you give to people who are headed out in ministry in terms of the future and what they can expect as they minister and perhaps underneath this question I have this, how is ministry changing as a result of what has happened culturally versus perhaps when you and I were starting to go to school?

Well, when I was a small boy I used to read your books.

That's right.

So I don't know that the timeframe is quite the same. But I remember sitting in your lap listening to your stories grandpa.

If you can believe that, that's right.

So but a couple things.

Help me out son.

There you go. A couple of things. I would say that – and you probably picked up earlier. I wouldn't believe the doom and gloom, because remember according to Michael Spencer, you know the Internet Monk, we've only got five years left until evangelicalism is all gone.
And I could tell you that's been the prediction for a very, very long time. But again statistically contrary to the doom and gloom people who will write a book, poll some stats, one of the things you'll find is people will always find the worst possible stats that are an outlier that nobody else has peer reviewed or looked at. And say, "Look it's all gonna die, buy my book to fix it."

And I would say to you that you're probably going to go to a church, most churches are plateaued or declining. But plateaued means plateau, it doesn't mean collapse or close. So you're probably going to go to plateau or decline churches. In the '70's percentages are that. And so I think you should prepare yourself with leadership skills and revitalization skills, and to – if you're going to pastor specifically. I think what you mentioned.

Dr. Darrell Bock  Yes.

Dr. Ed Stetzer  I think that we need to recognize that culturally we've lost our home field advantage. And I'll talk about that a little bit too. But in other words – and maybe Texas and Tennessee is still different. But Texas and Tennessee aren't shaping the culture. You know I mean Tennessee is, but –

Dr. Darrell Bock  That's how you like singing.

Dr. Ed Stetzer  Yeah, exactly. I would just say we had Taylor Swift.

Dr. Darrell Bock  Yeah.

Dr. Ed Stetzer  Actually Taylor Swift lived in the same – before she was famous, in the same city that I live in. So my daughters – I've actually been to a Taylor Swift concert. It's an ocean of estrogen. But it was actually quite weird. I took my daughters and it was like, "Oh." That was me, "Get me out of here." We are never, ever getting back together. Just shake it off.

So anyway. So what I would say is that there's still going to be some Bible belter stuff. But I would say one of the challenges culturally that we're going to have to address is that most churches, your denominations of the churches from which you come, get locked in the era where they are most successful. So Baptists, I hail from a Baptist tradition. If the '50's come back they are ready to go.
Dr. Darrell Bock  I know that hymnal.

Dr. Ed Stetzer  Yeah, exactly. You know and then – and again I've sat there at a national meeting of the Southern Baptists. And they invited me back to speak again. I'm like, "Really?" After what I said last time. I also said that I come every year to the Southern Baptist Convention, because it makes me feel young and thin. Invited me back the next year to speak again. But I think – so Baptists kind of lock there – but then there was a big move in the '80's. Everyone kind of got Hawaiian shirts and shoes without socks and started singing that big sound prom song to Jesus kind of feel in the '80's.

And what I would say, I look around now and a lot of churches, their band lacks like the Beach Boys not in the '60's but today. And I look around there's no 25 year olds in the building. And so what I would say is – and this is the Bible church tradition. So thriving in the '70's and the '80's let's look around the Bible church tradition today.

I've consulted with several of them; stuck, unsure what to do. Kind of launched in this movement and now kind of struggling. So what I would say is I think you're going to have to go into situations where you're going to have to lead people to think in missional ways is the phrase that I tend to use. But in missionary like ways. So how do we engage a culture that's shifted? It's shifted culturally. It's become more secular. It's become more tolerant. And so you can't get up and just say, "Well, this is what the bible says." Well, I mean so – I'm an expository preaching kind of guy. So how do I get up and to a secular society and say, well, this is what the bible says. And they say so what? And so if I'm trained to point by point, word by word, verse by verse teach people what the Bible says and nobody cares what the Bible say –

Dr. Darrell Bock  That's a problem.

Dr. Ed Stetzer  I have to come back and change my presuppositions.

Dr. Darrell Bock  Yeah, I like to say two things about this, because this is an important observation. One is we've gone from a culture where the Bible was the answer to now the Bible is the question.

Dr. Ed Stetzer  It's fair.
Dr. Darrell Bock: So you can't open up the Bible and assume that the answer provides us something people are going to trust. It might be interesting to them.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Even church people.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That's right. And the second one is it's one thing to say it's in the – it's true because it's in the Bible. It's another thing to say it's in the Bible, because it's true.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Yeah.

Dr. Darrell Bock: And that difference is also significant. And I think pastors are going to have to work harder at explaining the idea that it's in the Bible because it's true. And then up pack the truthfulness of what's there.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Well, the problem is they're going to have to do that simultaneously to the world of what thinks is in the Bible is unjust.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That's right. Or any other half dozen other things that could be a problem in relationship to it. So there's a whole layer of engagement. To think about that, that you have to – that you can't presuppose.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Yeah.

Dr. Darrell Bock: And that makes the burden on the scriptures – a burden on teaching the scriptures a more challenging. There's a whole area of apologetics that is completely different now in terms of what you are forced to engage with than would have been 30 years. Thirty years ago someone had produced the story saying there are extrabiblical gospels teaching that Jesus was married, that would have been laughed off as a comedy.

That's Marvel Comics stuff. But today that runs on mainline television. People take it seriously. And they don't even consider what the pedigree is of where the information is coming from.
Dr. Ed Stetzer: And the most recently the Harvard disaster. I mean it was on – I forget what magazines it was on. It was Time and all on the front page.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Oh, yeah absolutely.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: And like within weeks was completely debunked.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That's right.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: But again Easter it coming. Expect another “Meet Jesus’ Wife”.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Christmas and Easter that's right.

Dr. Ed Stetzer: Exactly.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That's where we got the renewal of Jesus's wife really a rebaking of something that the Da Vinci Code raised using what probably is an extrabiblical Jewish text, decoded so that it's not about the two figures of the text but recoded to be Jesus and Mary. And in that way we get through this parabolic mythic jump, the idea that Jesus is married, and people buy it. And so – and most people don't even know what that material is. It's much less be in a position in comment on it. So very, very important kind of process.

Well, our time for our interview, I think is up.