

Transcript 170

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. If you're a regular listener, you know that we occasionally like to invite a guest on to discuss some of the questions we get on a particular topic and joining me today is Doctor Mark Yarbrough. He's the President of Dallas Theological Seminary. He's been there since 2001. So in his words, he's a relic at Dallas Theological Seminary. And so, Mark, thank you for joining me today.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

It is a pleasure to be with you. We are big fans of Got Questions. And so thanks for what you do and just an honor to have a discussion with you.

Shea Houdmann

And so our listeners know I received a Masters degree from Dallas Theological Seminary recently. And I'm also in the doctor and ministry program there. So obviously, I'm a fan of Dallas Seminary as well. So Mark, I thought today we asked you some of the most frequently asked questions we receive about Christian education, but more specifically Christian, higher education. I couldn't imagine someone who'd be more thoroughly informed on these issues than you. So thanks for your willingness to join me today. So let's start off with kind of a general one and then we'll get more specific. The first question, what is the value of Christian higher education?

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

Christian higher education in terms of its value, is if it is not linked, centered in on the study of God's word then I'm not sure we could really call it Christian higher education. So part of it we almost need to kind of define what we mean when we say Christian higher education. There's lots of higher education. And I would be a frank gave a line supporters saying that all truth is God's truth. But when we generally confine Christian higher education and when we think about it like graduate level, when we think of Dallas Theological Seminary, it means that the core of our teaching is centered on Scripture. Knowing what God has said in his word. So you almost need to kind of define that because you can have a lot of education and a lot of really good things and things that are very valuable and important, and they can be taught by a Christian. And so they're going to see that and teach that through a Christian lens, a Christian perspective. But when we say Christian higher education, we're generally talking about from a western perspective, undergraduate or graduate, formal teaching with degree programs that are talking about Scripture, theology, Christian ministry, and preparation for a lot of vocational types of Christian service. So I think, at least in my discussion if I was talking about Christian higher education I would be confining it into that dialogue. It doesn't mean that everybody's going to go into vocational Christian ministry to be a pastor, or to be a missionary, or be involved in in teaching per say. But it is focused on scripture for our equipping to serve the Lord in whatever capacity He places us.

Shea Houdmann

That's excellent. I know a lot of people who aren't going into any sort of pastoral type of ministry who have chosen to go to Christian education for their own personal education, for even just a teaching role. But most people tend to think of Christian higher education, at least out of seminary, oh, you only need

that if you're going to be a pastor or if you're going to teach at the Christian university or seminary level. Why do you think that's a wrong mindset? What? What's some reasons you think I hate to use the term, but like the average ordinary Christian should consider Christian higher education?

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

Yeah, right.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

Oh, yes. Well, I'll, I'll answer that multiple ways. How about this? In my entry into this discussion is to say the reason it's for everybody is because we're all in ministry. Every believer is called to ministry. I think we, we are actually in a much better place, at least in some of the dialogue maybe than 20, 30, 40 years ago, and I'm going to say something and I don't mean this as denigrating, but I grew up in a wonderful little country church where my father was a bivocational pastor. And as a kid, I can remember prayer time. We had two dominant kinds of prayers. We had prayer number one was that we prayed for Donald and Dolores Harris because they were missionaries in Zimbabwe. And I mean that is a good thing. They were faithful people. They were in vocational Christian ministry. The other kind of prayers that we had was that we prayed for Aunt Martha's big toe, you know. I mean our ailments and what it means to be in this this fallen world and we should pray for those things too. But here's what we didn't pray for. I don't ever remember praying for John Martin, who worked for ADT, that was a faithful follower and had an opportunity to share the gospel through where the Lord has placed him. See, he was in ministry too, or Marvin Evans, who may have been one of the most faithful plumbers I've ever known, that shared Jesus on a regular basis.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

I think that it it's a good thing when I'm hearing more discussion about all believers are in ministry. This world is not our home, and Lord has us on the planet for a purpose. And so when I think of Christian higher education and I see this on our campus and I'm excited I see it at other good schools that we have wonderful affiliations with. You know we have a whole host of doctors and lawyers and engineers and homemakers. In fact, we actually have some very specific programs for them. It's for those, yeah, I looked up one day Caddy corner to our Dallas campus we have a large hospital, Baylor hospital, Baylor Scott and White. One of the largest healthcare providers in the state of Texas. And I looked up one day and we had like 35 doctors at that hospital that were taking classes at the seminary. And it's because they're saying that's a great mission field for us and we're getting asked lots of questions and we want to be better anchored. I love that because it's a reminder that all of us, if you name the name of Jesus Christ and you have trusted him, we're all in Christian ministry. And so I think that when we think about Christian higher education, it's good for us to think about that. It's for individuals that are going to be called to be pastors and missionaries, and Bible translators, and teach in a Christian School. But it's also for doctors and lawyers, and Sunday school teachers saying I want to be better equipped in God's word to be the salt and light that he's called every believer to be.

Shea Houdmann

I like how you linked some education in the sense of being better prepared to answer people's questions, but they Got Questions, that's what we do.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

There you go. That's what you do. Right.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah. So when we get asked the question that we don't know the answer to, which even after 21 years and who knows how many hundreds of thousands of questions, I think we're over approaching 800,000 questions have been submitted to us now. We still occasionally get one that we have never heard before and I have no idea, but even that the education teaches us how to be better prepared to know where to look, to know how to find answers, to have a foundation to answer the questions through. And so I've found the higher education extremely valuable not only just in giving me knowledge that I know the answers to a lot of these questions, but also even the equipping of knowing, knowing how to say I don't know the answer to that question, but I'll research it and get back to you. That's something that we do all the time at Got Questions even after 21 years. So no, the average ordinary Christian when I'll present Got Questions at a church or a conference, will ask like how can I be better at answering questions? And one of the answers I give is, be in the word be studying God's word. But God provides you with the opportunity studying the Bible and sound Christian theology at a seminary like Dallas Seminary is so incredibly valuable, just from the foundation that provides not just head knowledge but heart knowledge and knowing where to look to find the answers that you need for the questions that people are going to ask you.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

Amen. I couldn't phrase it any better. I mean, that's what we're that's what we're all doing, right. And that's why we so applaud Got Questions because it's helping people think biblically. And you know, goodness knows we live in a world where there's lots of data input and lots of ways. And. And I took my first programming class at the University of North Texas. And I walked into it for a computer programming class. I'll never forget that opening lecture. And it said, you know, trash in, trash out. What comes in, will go out. And there's a lot of truth to that. So if that's true about just what we intake of media and that this world is bombarding us and our children. That scripture is replete with statements about meditating on God's word. Knowing what God has said. Feast don't just stay as a babe, you know that's drinking milk. We need to move up to steak, and God wants that from us. He wants us to use the minds that he has given us. And for his glory. For our understanding of what he has revealed. But then so that we cannot just be grace recipients but also be grace givers. So that's why we're all in the same business. Christian higher education ultimately is taking God's truth, being informed by it, and being able to share that with others.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely. So grateful for the education and even back when I went to Calvary University and then Calvary Theological Seminary 20 years ago, the whole time I was like, I don't know why I'm doing this in the sense of I know I want to serve God, but I don't know what specific ministry gets calling me to. And now looking back, it was the perfect preparation for what God was calling me to. My wife, MeLissa, jokes that, well, the ministry God was calling you just hadn't been invented yet. So it's a really cool story. Just knowing how valuable I found my Christian education to be in preparing me for the ministry God's called me to. But let me ask you a question that we get fairly often whenever this topic comes up and

I'm sure you've dealt with people who present this question as well. None of the apostles had any formal education. Many people described in the Bible, throughout the New Testament didn't have any sort of formal education. With that in mind, do you think it's a danger sometimes for Christian higher education to be overemphasized to the point that some people think I can't serve God unless I have this higher education. And what's what's the corrective to that mindset?

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

Well it is a great question. You're spot on and I would always answer this. I'm going. Yeah, but boy, didn't they have the greatest professor of all time? You know, they they studied at the feet of Jesus. And I think, I think that's an important thing for us to remember. They were tutored by Jesus. They they walked with the Lord. And ultimately, whether we're talking about formal education or non formal education, when we're talking about Christian higher education, that's still the position that we find ourselves in, right. In other words, we are all still, whether it's working on a degree or not, if we're not walking with Jesus and studying at the feet of Jesus, and studying what has been revealed to us from Genesis to revelation because we really do believe that all scriptures God breathed, we make no apologies about that, right. We really believe that the Bible is the word of God. So in one sense, my point is to say on the one hand, we all have access to our Lord because we have his word. And so that means that there's a there is a even playing field. We all have an opportunity to study with Jesus. In many ways, just like they did. Now, I do believe that higher education also gives us, there are those that God calls in very specific areas of ministry service. And so as you know at Dallas Seminary is a school that is an all graduate. So we only have masters and doctoral level programs at Dallas Seminary. But when you put all that kind of together, there's nothing wrong with aspiring towards a degree and being better equipped. But that doesn't make anybody better. It means that someone may have expertise that they have spent time studying. And compare this with any other discipline.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

So think of it this way, you know, if you, you and I had a a medical emergency, I promise you this Mark Gilbert had a ruptured appendix. I'm gonna go to a doctor and my prayer is that that that person, that man or woman that's my doctor, that's about to do surgery on me, I hope they're equipped, right? I mean, I want them to have, you know, they just didn't do a something on the side? No. Well, I haven't really ever done this before, but trust me, I'm a doctor. You know I want to know that they've really they can do this. Well, I think that's true. So think of the spectrum that we just had. We can all be students on the one hand. And you know I look at the apostles and you're exactly right. They did not have a a THM from Dallas Theological Seminary. You know, there's not a one of them that did. You could maybe argue that the apostle Paul got pretty close, right? I mean, he went through some formal training, in formal study. But I also realized that there are a lot of statements in Scripture that are pointing us to know what God has said. To live that out. To be diligent with what has been provided us. We now have God's word in totality, these 66 books that we have. So I think you've got to look at it in a spectrum. And praise the Lord that through the centuries God has a tendency to take very normal people that are faithful, that are committed to his word and God uses them in mighty ways. God has a way of taking the normal and making it abnormal for his glory. And whether that's with a formal degree or a non formal degree, we're back to square one where we started with Christian higher education. We're all in ministry. So God has a expectation for every believer to grow and mature in the faith so that we're better equipped to serve him while he leaves us here.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely. I I was thinking of the exact same illustration is that if I want someone to teach me the Bible and theology, wouldn't I want someone who has spent years studying it and has the expertise similarly to if I need surgery I want a Doctor who absolutely knows what he's doing. If I'm hiring a lawyer, I want the best lawyer possible to defend me, so I completely agree with you on the expertise aspect of this conversation.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

That's right.

Shea Houdmann

One other thing and I'm sure you've heard this one as well, the attitude of I have the Holy Spirit living inside me, he can teach me. He can help me understand God's word, why do I need to be taught by anyone else? What's the what's the best response to that attitude?

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

I think the best response to that is the one that I always say, maturation never occurs overnight. Human experience teaches us that. Can God, can God do miracles? Without question. And does God reveal what our perspective needs to be? Certainly. God's still moving and active, but there is too much teaching in scripture about studying. And again I'm going to use certain words. There, there would be hundreds of texts behind every one of these about meditating on God's word. Studying to show that you are approved, meaning affirmed in what it is that you're convinced of, that God has revealed in Scripture. To be prepared to have answers when people ask, that great passage that in Peters connotation. I mean we could go on and on about being diligent stewards of what God has trusted to us.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

So I think personally we live in a world that is wanting to do things fast and furious without cost, without work, to be perfectly honest. And I would say we can never have our spiritual growth and development be scapegoated through our laziness. And we are human beings, and God wants us to grow and develop and walk with him. And praise God, I think I'm not the same person that I was 20 years ago. Why? Because the Lord's incredible patience with me and continuing to teach. So I think if that is our our scapegoat. And it sounds ironic to say that I don't want to be quoted here or somebody tweet this out on me or ex me out here on this one of saying you know well, Mark's saying don't be dependent upon the Holy Spirit. No, that's not what I'm saying at all. I'm saying be dependent upon the Holy Spirit. And there most times in life it is a slow, steady growth of development. It's not a miraculous moment where God says here's a download of information for you.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

I mean, can you imagine going to a church where a pastor is going to preach and saying, well, now we're back to our analogy again, saying I, I have no idea what God's going to say, so I didn't prep. I haven't been reading, haven't been studying at all. And this is what I'm just going to say. Unfortunately, there are some churches that do that. We don't do that with anywhere else in life. You don't go to your doctor and the doctor, I've never done this before. We're just gonna give it a shot here and see if God does a miracle. I mean, that's just ludicrous. So I don't think we should have that same expectation when we

come to God's word. God. God wants us to submit our hearts and lives to him. And if you're like me, you know, sometimes God does his greatest work when I'm on the slow burner and he's percolating things. And we live in a very busy, fast-paced world. He wants me to slow down and listen. He's been speaking all along. I need to listen sometimes he uses time to do that.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, no doubt. Even the the separation of people into like the solo Christian mindset rather than the studying theology, studying the Bible and community being taught by others, teaching others, learning together, the Bible presents, I mean the whole episode on the body of Christ, what that means, what the church is, why we're to be learning and studying and worshiping and praying in community. But I've never met anyone who has the solo Christian attitude where I don't need anyone else to teach me. I have the Holy Spirit, I have the Bible. That's all I need. Who hasn't also drifted into some sort of theological error that a little bit of with its formal education, or at least regular Biblical education, would have prevented them from going down that road of theology error. There this little Christian mindset is it's it's very dangerous and it very often leads to unhealthy thinking and unbiblical doctrine.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

Ohh I'm so with you. Not only are we made for community, but that community is a protective hedge. You know, in the history of the church, it's always been that way. That's very biblical model of the there's wisdom and a multitude of counselors. But you know I always use that great picture, you know that, and it's true for lots of different reasons. But, you know, I'm a I've always enjoyed National Geographic. And you know, you're always watching that, that gazelle that gets away from the herd, you know, and they pan the other cameras and you're seeing the lions that are over in the weeds. And you're like, look, gazelle, get back to the herd. You know, I mean, troubles on the horizon and to your point of your illustration and saying, you know, every good heresy started with isolation and then, you know, promoting that and running down a path outside of that community. And God does some of his greatest work when we are walking in step, in fellowship with the spirit and dependence upon who God is with other believers and constantly saturating ourself with his word. I mean that's kind of my my little makeup for determining the will of God right there when I have that that dialogue with hundreds of students, you know, how do I know what the will of God is and how? What's my model to get there? Those are generally the three or four things that I talk about with students.

Shea Houdmann

So excellent. Let's jump to the kind of the other side of the equation. My experience at Dallas Theological Center has been the opposite of this, but. I do know some scholars, some professors at other schools and in churches who they're so so into education. They're so fiercely intelligent and highly educated that they can no longer really put the cookies on the lower shelf so to speak. That they speak in such deep theological terms, and you appreciate their brilliance, and they're glad, I'm glad this person is on our team, but man can no longer communicate, if the vast majority. How do we avoid that? Because I'm a learner. I love to learn. I've thoroughly enjoyed all the education I receive. I love to read. But how do we love education and research and want to know everything we can about everything while also not missing the point that if we can't then communicate that at a so to speak, lay level, we're we're missing the point.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

Yeah. Well, I'll tell you what, you know, that's a that's a temptation for any of us that are just wired that way for learning. And we're inquisitive and there's, you know, it was, uh, you know, Solomon, you know, said that the studying of many books, you know, it's exhausting. It's, it's unending. It's it'll go forever. You know, what you're you're up to 800,000 questions. Well, you can come up with two million. You can. Come up with. We're not going to run out of questions right. So you're exactly right. I tell you. I think the greatest preventative for any believer that, let's say the Lord's given them a special dose of brilliance. OK, let's just say that for the sake of discussion here. I know some believers like that. And like you said, I'm so glad they're God's called him to himself. And they are brilliant. There's no doubt about it. And and then they're just, you know, they have a quest for knowing more. And there's nothing wrong with that. I think the greatest preventative is that you can't stay there. It's a dangerous place to stay. We could have a whole episode just on that too. It's a dangerous place because what that will do to us.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

But here's my preventative, if someone knows that, and they have the propensity to kind of be there and to just I just want to read the latest books and I want to, you know, I want to just talk about Christian theology and I want to is that the preventative is to deal with and work with and engage with those that are not there. It's the greatest preventative. You and I probably had the same privilege of studying under somebody by the name of Howard Hendricks, who was probably the master of put the cookies on the lower shelf. He used that phrase he used to say that all the time. And I think that we have to have ways to engage with a couple of different constituencies. OK, and here's what I mean. Non believers, individuals that do not know the Lord. That will help you have a real theology check. Working with individuals that are not believers, you and and as friends and people that you care about, that you, you are neighbors with. Maybe may not know the Lord, but you can sure love them and you can talk to them and know what's going on in their world, in their life. And and you know what bubbles up are the questions of life. If you love me. OK.

Dr Mark Yarbrough

The second thing is to work with young believers, individuals that have just come to faith. You know we use a whole lot of Christian jargon. And there's nothing wrong with it, but you know and you know, I could sit around and talk, you know, perspectives of substitutionary atonement and penal substitution and transubstantiation, and what propitiation even means and how all this fits into theological grids of, you know, Protestantism versus Catholic theology. And what was I mean, you know, I just blobbed out a whole bunch, right there, big giant words right? And you know what brand new believers they like, I have no idea what you just said. Put the cookies on the lower shelf. If you're not working with people that need cookies on the lower shelf and you're not working with non believers, you're going to live up here in a world that is only valuable to you after too long. God didn't put us here to live there in that circle. We are to engage in a broken world around us. And if that's not why we're doing what we're doing, then we're doing it for the wrong reasons.

Dr Mark Yarbrough

I say this, I get to. I am very privileged to get to teach almost all of our new students that come to the seminary. And one of the things that I say on a regular basis and I, I, I look them all in the eye and I say

this, if you are here to get a piece of paper and to hang it on the wall to Lord it over others, then do yourself, do me, do Dallas Seminary and most importantly, do the Lord a favor and go down to the registrar's office and withdraw. That's not why we're doing what we're doing. We're doing this to get to be equipped so that we can share with others.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

I'll give you 1 little antidote and I'll, I'll quit talking here for a second. But we've got some real brilliant profs here at Dallas Seminary. And one of my favorite guys, I had him as a student even when I was here back in the 90s, a guy by the name of Bob Chisholm. He's brilliant teaching Old Testament, biblical languages. Brilliant. He's written extensively and in the whole linguistic Semitic field, he's a he's a known quantity. What a lot of people don't know is that Bob Chisholm goes out to the great state fair of Texas every year and he mans a booth for evangelism. Just to talk with people and share. Would they have questions about anything about life and what the gospel is and what Christians believe. And so here's a brilliant man of semitics. Teaches Hebrew you know, in his sleep. That can also say, you know what this is about? It's about a God that loves you. That sent his son Jesus to pay the price for your sins. Let's not make this more difficult than it needs to be. And I think that's what we're all called to do. So great question that you've asked and and we all have to be careful not to stay up here. We we got to make it real because that's where we got to live. That's where we're called to live by God.

Shea Houdmann

The very first question we received at Got Questions was how do you explain the Trinity to a non believer? And I remember getting that question is like how do you explain the trinity? Yeah, I think I'm ready, but to a non believer that's a throws a whole new dynamic into the question. So that's a constant reminder for us is that especially in when someone submits a question, if they're asking you what are the theological ramifications of dispensational premillennialism on the interpretation of passage? OK, you know, you can answer that question on a more scholarly level, but when someone asks how can I be sure that Jesus is coming back? Well, OK, because you're publishing as an article, you need to write it in a way that as many people as possible can understand what you're saying. And then save the super deep theology for the people when they ask about it, or when they make it, even that they're looking for it. So yeah, it's a constant balance and that wanting to go super, super deep, but also recognizing that not everyone is is there. So I didn't even know that the cookies on the lower shelf came from Doctor Hendrix, but it doesn't surprise me at all to to hear that from you. So we could go on and on and on. And I definitely didn't want this episode to be a infomercial, so to speak, on Dallas Seminary, but in our closing moments I'd love for you to share how can some people who might be interested to learn some more about Dallas Seminary and some of the things that you offer that you think they might find interesting.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

Well, the Lord's doing a lot of great things here and we're really excited. It's it's, it's what he's doing. And to your point, there are so many wonderful places, it's this is not a Dallas seminary thing. It's look for good, conservative, Bible believing, teaching places. I would say that. And I've got dear friends and other wonderful ministries and certainly that's who you guys are. That's what you do. You know, we're we're all committed to the belief that this is God's word. We have a variety of courses, obviously we've got programs that are going again, I mentioned that for those that are going into more vocational Christian

ministry, for those that are called into, you know, pastoral ministry and they're going to be preaching and teaching on a regular basis. We've got Christian education. We've got individuals that are here that the Lord's called them into counseling, you know. And a variety of counseling ministries. And we have an apologetics and evangelism program that is just super exciting. We have corporate USA that's calling and saying, hey, we think we want to, you know, hire a chaplain. We've got a chaplaincy program and I'm not talking just at the hospital. We've got companies that are saying, we know if we love our people better, they're going to be better employees. What a great opportunity to represent the Lord in the corporate world. And so we've got a lot of formal programs, but you know in the last couple of years, we've also offered some non formal classes that are free to the world. And we've got about 600,000 students that are taking these free classes all over the world now, primarily in English. You can do them in Chinese and Spanish as well. We're moving into Arabic. We're moving to the top 10 languages of the world and we've got pastors that are studying with us in the global South and Sunday school teachers and those are completely free. And all you have to do is Google DTS free courses and they'll all come up. We got about 35 of them that are out there and we think they're anchored in the word. And so there's a lot of resources that are available that we're trying to make available to people. And so it's just an honor for us to get to be part of what God's doing, we're a small part of it and we just want to be faithful in our time around the lap. So it's been a that's some of what's going on on the on our campuses.

Shea Houdmann

Fantastic. As I said earlier, I've been very grateful for my education through Dallas Theological Seminary and I highly recommended that you don't have to necessarily go for a Masters degree. Just take a course and see if it wets your appetite or even explore some of the free courses. And we will include some links to where you can learn more information in the show notes for this episode at podcast.GotQuestions.org and also in the description when this video goes live on YouTube. So Doctor Mark Yarbrough, thank you for joining me today. Thank you for the conversation. Thank you for all that you're doing at Dallas Theological Seminary and the great impact that's having on many people's lives, both through the people who take the courses, get the degrees, but then also and communicate biblical truth with passion, with love, and with the desire just to point people towards Christ.

Dr. Mark Yarbrough

Well, it's been my privilege. And thank you guys for what you do. And I sincerely mean that as we're all in it together. And so I know together as two brothers, we would say to God be the glory. And let's just keep at it.

Shea Houdmann

Amen. This has been the Got Questions podcast with Doctor Mark Yarbrough, the President of Dallas Theological Seminary, on what is the value of Christian higher education and exploring some of the other questions that we receive at Got Questions on the topic. So got questions? The Bible has the answers and we'll help you find them.