

# *TRANSCRIPT*

*Rev. Todd Wilken, Host*

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## **"The Decline of American Evangelicalism"**

**Guest:**

**Dr. David Wells**

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**Author of *No Place for Truth* and *The Courage to Be Protestant***

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**WILKEN:** It's a difficult thing to define and partly because American Evangelicalism has over the past 30-40 years almost defined itself out of existence, at least theologically. If you look at the thing as a theological movement, it started out fairly robust in the Protestant tradition but then, as I said, began to define itself out of existence. The tenets of American Evangelicalism theologically became fewer and fewer, until it's hard to find any at all—perhaps a kind of blanket adherence to the Bible in some sense as God's Word, Jesus seems to be pretty important in the mix, but beyond that, it's hard to get any consensus among American Evangelicals about what they're really all about. And has the evangel, that is, the Gospel, survived the movements of American Evangelicalism? They've certainly been moving and shaking in the last 35 years, but in what direction? Greetings, and welcome to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in. Our call in number for the next hour program: 1-877-623-6943. We're going to be talking with Dr. David Wells. 1-877-623-MY-IE. Our in-studio email address: [HYPERLINK "mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org"](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org) [talkback@issuesetc.org](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org). Dr. David Wells is distinguished professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. He's author of several books, including his latest, *The Courage to Be Protestant*. Dr. Wells, welcome back.

**WELLS:** Well, thank you so much, Todd.

**WILKEN:** It was back in 1993 that you wrote *No Place for Truth*. It was a pretty bare-knuckled assessment of American Evangelicalism at the time. Have things improved at all in the last sixteen years?

**WELLS:** Well, thank you. What you describe is probably correct. When I wrote *No Place for Truth*, as one of my friends said to me after that book, "There would be no place for Wells." And I was describing very clearly what I was seeing. But not a lot of other people appeared to be seeing the same things. But I would say today, what back then—fifteen to twenty years ago—what back then was in germinal seed form has now burst out into view. And I'm really in a way gratified, although I wish I weren't, at how many people now are beginning to say and to see the very things that I was writing about when I wrote *No Place for Truth*.

**WILKEN:** Well, I'm wondering, one of the most intriguing things that you point out in, and it's been a sense of mine—adhering to a traditional, confessional Lutheran position in both doctrine and practice as a pastor in a Lutheran church body, a sense of mine for a long time—that the traditional church, as defined by those confessions especially in the Reformation, is under attack. You, I was shocked to find in your book, say yes, it is. Why, and by who?

**WELLS:** Well, it undoubtedly is under attack, and lest people misunderstand the point here, let us agree. There are some traditional churches which are moribund, dying, should not be defended, and are on their way out of existence. Let's agree that that is the case. But the whole point, I think, in the attack on the traditional church is that traditional churches have defined their lives by the doctrine which they have believed. This is what has given definition to the life of their church. This is what explains what they do. This is at the core of their message. Their Gospel message is a message of teaching, of doctrine, about the person and the work of Christ, and about the necessity of faith, and that Christ did uniquely, did what no one else has ever done, and that we need to entrust ourselves to Him and so on. This is what has defined the church and its message. The attack upon the traditional church is an attack upon the place of doctrine in defining the church. Because what people have wanted is a free hand to develop this enterprise in the way they want, for a consumer that they have in mind, in order to become more successful. And many of them have indeed become most successful, if by that you are judging by numbers. There are huge mega-churches, as you know, that have catered to a consumer, and the way they have catered is by holding doctrinal beliefs in abeyance. They have been almost concealed so that somebody coming into this church would hardly know what the church believes.

Now, this, I have to tell you, this is a strategic blunder of the first order. Quite apart from the fact

that it goes to the very heart of what Christian faith is really about, but leaving that aside for a second, what these mega-churches are discovering, because so many of them now are simply imploding, is that the very consumers whom they were seeking to entice by this non-doctrinal, non-particular sort of message, are being despised by the consumers that they had wanted. These people come in one door, find that there is nothing particular about the church that they can't find somewhere else, and they go out the back door. Bill Hybel's study, called *Reveal*, which was a study on his and a few other churches like his, was simply stunning. And it was stunning because he was the one who had initiated it, and what he found was that this whole approach had produced virtually nothing in the lives of the people who were coming to the church. But, leaving aside the question of its effectiveness, the truth of the matter is that Christian faith is a counter-cultural message in the sense that it is saying that in the Christian Gospel and in the Christ who is at the heart of that Gospel, we are finding what cannot be found in ourselves or in our culture around us. It's not another twelve-step program. It's not a self-help program. This is something unique to Christian faith, and it cannot be found in our culture. So if we lose that, then we've lost everything.

**WILKEN:** So, with just a few minutes here before we take our first break, Dr. Wells, you mentioned the *Reveal* study that the Willow Creek Association undertook. They were rather alarmed to discover that the longer people remained associated with them, the less satisfied they were with what Willow Creek was offering, and the deeper they grew in their Christian faith, at least by measurable accounts, the more they wanted more meaty, Biblical teaching from the Willow Creek staff. I'm intrigued by what you make of Bill Hybel's solution, which was, "Well, you know, we're not going to feed these people with God's Word. We're just going to have to teach them to feed themselves." He used the term "self-feeders." And he seemed rather put out that people would want to be fed as sheep in a Christian church. Your assessment there, with only about a minute before we take a break.

**WELLS:** What he did was to roll out a new business plan to replace the failed business plan. It raises the question as to what the church is about. My answer, which I think is from the New Testament, is that the church is there to teach people to walk with God, to believe the truth that He has given. In this time in which we are living, this is more needed than ever because living in the West, living in a society like ours, with all of its wonderful, magnificent opportunities and choices, nevertheless is extremely difficult, and we need God's truth if we are to stand upright and survive.

**WILKEN:** Dr. David Wells is our guest. He's distinguished professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. He's author of several books, including his latest, *The Courage to Be Protestant*. We're giving the book away to listeners with the best questions or comments. Our email address: [HYPERLINK "mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org"](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org) [talkback@issuesetc.org](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org), and our phone number: 1-877-623-6943, 877-623-MY-IE. To the best questions or comments, *The Courage to Be Protestant* by Dr. David Wells, our guest. When we come back: So, what is the way back for American Evangelicalism? Back to its Protestant and Reformation roots? Do we have to reinvent the wheel? We'll find out after this, with Dr. David Wells.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* Dr. David Wells is our guest. We're talking about the decline of American Evangelicalism. Dr. Wells, let's talk about marketing. You have written extensively about this. Has the marketing approach for American Evangelicals been a help or a harm to the enterprise of the Gospel?

**WELLS:** I would say it has been disastrous. Because what it has done has, if I can use the language, it has rebranded the meaning of Christian faith. It has taken, as it were, the old product and in effect transformed it so that it is now something entirely different and we are increasingly seeing the consequences of this. Not only in simple, Biblical illiteracy, because the Bible isn't taught, but in much more profound ways that the whole understanding of a Biblical

worldview has simply disintegrated. If Bonner's studies are correct, among the 18-23 year old bracket, among those who claim to be born again, one percent has a Biblical worldview. And I don't know if you saw the Pew study, in which a majority of evangelicals believe that salvation can be found in other religions. Now, if you just take these little brief snapshots of the evangelical movement, something disastrous has befallen it. Now, I don't blame the marketers entirely for this. But a large degree of the blame falls on their shoulders because they have simply, in terms of numbers they have moved a large part of the movement off in the direction which is simply destructive.

**WILKEN:** All right, then. I was reading through your book and I was thinking to myself, my own church body, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, sad to say, at least in its leadership and the leading lights there, have been coming to these approaches like marketing and the very things that have plagued evangelicalism for the last 35 years, they're just coming to this now and saying, "Wow, this is just marvelous" as it is proving disastrous for American evangelicals. What would you say to someone who says, "Look, this is the future. Marketing ourselves, massaging and repackaging the message and paring down our doctrinal distinctives to be of a broader appeal to the culture." How would you respond?

**WELLS:** Well, I would respond by saying that every time the Christian faith has tried to pare down its essential beliefs in order to accommodate itself to the culture, going back to the Old Testament narrative but coming all the way down through history, every time this has happened, disaster has followed shortly thereafter. This is simply the old liberal mindset. The old, classical liberals made their accommodations to high culture; evangelicals are making it to popular culture. But the end result is going to be the same, and the end result is, in fact, what we see in the mainline denominations today, which are disintegrating. If people were really on the cutting edge, instead of 20-30 years behind, as people you are describing, if they were really on the cutting edge, what they would be able to see is that the whole marketing enterprise is disintegrating before our eyes, and the emergents are falling apart also, heading off into different directions because of their multiple accommodations to postmodern culture. But there is, however—and I think it's located in the 20s and 30s and 40s—there is today a rather amazing rekindling of a desire for the real thing. A desire for what you see at the time of the Reformation and certainly what you have in the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. And the reason for it is that this is a segment of our population that on the one hand has been marketed to, to the death. So they don't want the Gospel to be marketed to them again as another product. And on the other hand, what they're trying to get away from are the consequences of capitulation to the culture that they have seen in all of their friends. So they're looking for the real deal. I don't know if you saw *Time Magazine*, maybe three weeks ago, it listed ten trends, and I think trend number three was what they called "The New Calvinism." Well, it's not narrowly Calvinism. What it is, is a new seriousness among, I think, younger people, 20s, 30s, 40s— younger by my standards—who are looking for the real deal, and I think this is where our real future is.

**WILKEN:** Okay. You mentioned the emergent movement, or "emergence" or "emerging," it goes by various terms, but give us a brief introduction to this attempt to respond to classical liberalism and pop American Christianity, and why it is already, after only, what, less than ten years, flying apart at the seams.

**WELLS:** Well, this is really just another attempt at marketing. But the target audience is different. Bill Hybels and company marketed to the baby boomers. The emergents are really marketing to a younger generation, principally Generation X. And it has a different cultural mindset. The consequence of this is that when you get this amalgam, this translation of Christian faith, into these cultural terms, it has a different look and feel to it from what you see in Hybels and Willow Creek and that whole movement. It reflects the generational shift and the different set of attitudes. And among emergents what you have is an even slimmer doctrinal core, and a willingness to make cultural alliances of a different kind. This is the generation that

has been most hurt by divorce and the stresses and strains of our home lives, which have only increased with the passing of the years. And so this generation is much more relational, much more “clubby,” if I can put it like that. They want to “hang together,” they put great stress on this. They therefore correspondingly do not like judgmental attitudes, what they call judgmental attitudes. They don’t want anything that will intrude upon relationships. They will not, therefore, judge personal lifestyle issues. They won’t judge homosexuality. To their credit, they are much more attuned to human suffering, but they are much less attuned to the potential of suffering beyond death, of which Scripture speaks. They just have an entirely different mindset. But by their very nature, they’re not institution builders. They’re trying to escape from the boundaries and the restrictions of doctrine. So they are pulling away from each other in a multitude of different directions, and some in their movement are already saying, “The movement’s done. It’s all over.”

**WILKEN:** We’re talking with Dr. David Wells, distinguished professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. He’s author of several books, including his latest, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*. We’re giving this book away to the listeners with the best questions or comments. Either give us a call, 1-877-623-6943, 877-623-MY-IE, or you can email us right here in the studio, [HYPERLINK "mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org" talkback@issuesetc.org](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org). You can purchase *The Courage to be Protestant* under the “On Demand” page of our website, as well: [issuesetc.org](http://issuesetc.org).

When we come back, one of the things that Dr. Wells points out in his book is the disappearance of the church. It is replaced, of course. The vacuum is never left empty. It is replaced, of course, in the minds of many American evangelicals, with what is probably best called the “para-church,” that is, an organization that doesn’t claim to be church, but in some ways fills the gap left by a church that has disappeared. Many churches, classical congregations, have been happy to either morph into a para-church themselves, or to let the para-church swoop in and fill the gap that they are leaving there. But the last time I checked, according to Scripture, the church is not an optional institution, and it’s not a human institution. It’s a divine institution, left here by Christ in His Word and Sacraments that cannot be replaced. We’ll talk more about that after this.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** We’re talking about the decline of American Evangelicalism. Dr. David Wells is our guest. Dr. Wells, let’s talk about—you make a point in your book that churches have not so much declined as disappeared or been replaced, in a lot of cases, by the para-church. What is the para-church, and why can’t it substitute for the churches we have known for nearly two millennia?

**WELLS:** Yes, and to that one should also add by online communities. You know, this takes the whole process even one step further. In fact, all over America today there are people who not only don’t go to their church that they once went to, they don’t even go to a small group with live people, but they simply go online to these virtual communities.

Well, very quickly, this, I believe, is what’s happened. First, when evangelicals came together after the Second World War, to try to put together a working coalition of believers, they reduced the core that had to be believed to some essentials. And freedom was given around those essentials. What has happened with the passing of time is that those essentials have become even fewer and they’ve become more slender. They’ve lost their substance and depth with the passing of the years. This is not true of everybody, but this is just a general tendency. So that’s the first thing that’s happened.

The second thing that’s happened is this: that evangelicals took what had been a distinction of the Reformation, a very proper distinction, and they ran with it. The distinction was between the Church visible and invisible. The Church invisible is that fellowship of all true believers who have trusted in Christ solely for their salvation, by grace alone, through faith alone. It is a fellowship

that stretches across the ages. The visible Church is those who gather together Sunday by Sunday for worship, proclamation, Sacraments, witness. And evangelicals said, "Now, of these two, which is more important? Well, of course it is the invisible Church." So they put all their eggs in this basket.

In time, so much of the evangelical effort went into this, into the pursuit of ministries that were Gospel ministries, because they wanted to build the invisible Church. And the visible Church, by comparison, shrank. What happened then was that as local churches faltered and stumbled sometimes and didn't do the things that they should have been doing, structures and organizations popped up alongside them to do what the churches should have been doing but hadn't been doing. Now, a very good illustration of that is the Bible Study Fellowship. In the churches the Bible was not being effectively preached and taught and learned, and BSF came alongside the churches and started doing this very effectively and had a wonderful ministry. But in the early post-War years, para-church organizations functioned, as it were, within the church. They were for the church. They didn't look on themselves as having an independent life. What began to happen in the 70s and 80s, as the entrepreneurs became prominent in evangelicalism and as the whole business model took over, these para-church organizations became a thing unto themselves. They became business enterprises. They went out to get financing in the evangelical world, they lived for themselves, and increasingly evangelicals gave their time and attention to the para-church organizations and their interest in the local church diminished, and then in the final stage of evolution they moved on, many of them onto the internet. I don't know if Barna is right, but he projects a short period of time, a few years, 80 percent of evangelicals will get their spiritual sustenance online.

**WILKEN:** So, is it the beginning or perhaps the first years of a post-evangelical era? When we say the word "evangelical" now, are we uttering nonsense?

**WELLS:** I think that we are at the end of what has been quite an extraordinary story and extraordinarily good in many ways. But I think that we are now at the end. I think it is disintegrating. I think you will see happening, if it hasn't already, what happened last century. Don't forget that the classical liberal Protestants were all born in evangelical homes. Then they encountered the modern world. Typically, it was in university where they came face-to-face with Darwin and some of the other intellectual challengers. And they made their peace with the modern world. And today what is happening, I think, is that, coming out of the loins of evangelicalism, we are giving birth to a new, nascent, liberal Protestantism. And you see it in particular in the emergents. So I see this as the end of a chapter, and what I am looking for and hoping for is the birth, the beginnings, of a new movement that will take, will draw together serious-minded, Biblically-focused, Christ-honoring evangelicals from the current time and perhaps we can redo the story all over again, but without what in fact has become baggage on the evangelical world.

**WILKEN:** So, folks, what do you think about the state of American Evangelicalism? Our call-in number: 1-877-623-6943. We're talking with Dr. David Wells. 877-623-MY-IE, or [HYPERLINK "mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org"](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org) [talkback@issuesetc.org](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org). Listeners with the best questions or comments will get Dr. Wells' book, *The Courage to Be Protestant*. Steve is listening in St. Louis. Hi, Steve.

**STEVE:** Hi, how are you doing?

**WILKEN:** Very well.

**STEVE:** Good. A couple of observations. First of all, I think one of the problems is that with the advent of these non-denominational churches, you see the minimalization of theology at best, if not the discarding. And what they do is they replace theology with marketing. And that goes to his point about everybody being marketed to. I think what happens is then, these churches' organizations are filling the void that the church has done because they're trying to do that theological void the churches had avoided, because, again, the avoidance of learning to have the theological differences that define Lutherans or Presbyterians, Calvinists, etc.



**WILKEN:** Steve, thank you very much. What do you make of his observations, Dr. Wells?

**WELLS:** I think his observation's right on target. If you think back—and maybe some of the people listening can't think back thirty or forty years because they're too young—but I can think back to that time, and I remember how important theology was to evangelicals. Indeed, it was so important that we sometimes had difficulty reigning in our passions over our differences. Today, you know you're hard-pressed to find people like that. What divides us today, and I'm speaking here in general, what divides us today is not so much doctrinal differences as differences in the way in which we appropriate culture. Now, part of our culture is, of course, that we are consumers. Our world is filled with marketing. And so one of our differences is, what do you make of this marketing? How much can you use? Should you use it in the church? This is where our debates are. But the underlying debate that we really should be having is the point that's just been made. It is about the nature of Christian truth, with respect to the person of Christ, with respect to the nature of the Gospel, to fallen human nature, to human destiny, to faith and grace. These are the things that are the bedrock discussions that we really need to be having if the church is to survive.

**WILKEN:** We're going to talk more about that on the other side of the break. Dr. David Wells is our guest. We'll also get to your email as well. Some final questions for Dr. Wells: Does he expect megachurches that have marketed themselves into this current position to follow the mainline Protestant liberal denominations on moral issues, and how ironic is it that the church has not succumbed by persecution or suppression, but by surrender, capitulation, and accommodation to the culture? We'll be right back.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** We're talking about the decline of American Evangelicalism. I'm Todd Wilken. This is *Issues, Etc.* Dr. David Wells is our guest.

Coming up on June 30<sup>th</sup> we're going to celebrate a one-year anniversary here at Lutheran Public Radio: *Issues, Etc.*'s one-year return to the air. June 30<sup>th</sup>, that's a Tuesday, and starting at four o'clock that afternoon we'd like to invite you, our listeners, to come out and celebrate with us first by watching the show being done live and then to join us for some food, some friendship, and just a little reminiscence about the one-year anniversary of the return of *Issues, Etc.* It's Tuesday June the 30<sup>th</sup>, starting at four o'clock, right here at the studios of LPR in Collinsville, IL. Now, you need to RSVP or any questions you may have about how to get here. We need to know how many you're going to bring when you come. RSVP to HYPERLINK "mailto:craig@issuesetc.org" [craig@issuesetc.org](mailto:craig@issuesetc.org). It's the one-year anniversary of our return to the air, Tuesday, June the 30<sup>th</sup>, beginning at four o'clock, here at LPR Studios in Collinsville, IL. Our call-in number: 1-877-623-6943, or HYPERLINK "mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org" [talkback@issuesetc.org](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org). Ken in Orlando, FL emails us. He says, "What will happen to the church that has courted the culture when that culture turns against it with intolerance and persecution?" Dr. Wells?

**WELLS:** Well, as a famous English churchman said, "He who is married to the spirit of the age today will be a widow tomorrow." And that's what's going to happen if we court and marry the spirit of our own age, what we're going to find is it's quickly going to move on, and the favor that we might have been granted today might very well turn to hostility tomorrow. But in any case, even if it doesn't, we will be judged irrelevant as a new cultural mood moves through the nation.

**WILKEN:** Rebecca in Michigan emails us. She says, "Are most of us lay people too ill-equipped to reign in some of the marketing tendencies of the church? Who will have to do the heavy lifting for gaining Biblical knowledge? If it will be the ordained ministers, where have they been?" Your response, Dr. Wells?

**WELLS:** I think she asks a wonderful question. Where have the ordained ministers been? I think it's very hard for lay people to see the situation and to know exactly what to do. Indeed, I don't know what to do, except to try my best to describe what's happening and hope that maybe somebody, somewhere, will listen. But it's very hard to put the brakes on this train because it

seems to be, has seemed to be, so successful. There are, as you know, churches that are mammoth size that have become so with very little, or even no reference to Christian truth. And I would say that Joel Osteen's church is a prime example. So how do you put the brakes on this? How do you alert people to it? Unless people really want to know the truth, and want to pursue the God of that truth, they will be seduced by almost anything.

**WILKEN:** How far will American Evangelicalism, as long as it continues to survive institutionally, how far will it follow the culture? We know that classical kind of mainline Protestant liberalism has been willing to follow the culture, up to this point, wherever the culture leads. We have the Episcopal Church USA with openly homosexual bishops and gay marriages and all the other things, and who knows what's coming next. Do you expect the mega-church movements, that have marketed themselves so successfully, as you say, to the culture, will they follow so far?

**WELLS:** Let me just make a small distinction. There are some mega-churches which have become large, but not by marketing themselves. And the difference is that the churches that I'm talking about are large because they have made known up front their nature as Biblical, doctrinal believing churches. They haven't tried to hide that in the interest of reaching consumers. So there is that little distinction.

But in answer to your question, the marketing mega-churches, I think, actually are in a real bind right now. If you look at some of the studies that have been done of their pastors, most of them still think of themselves as being orthodox in an evangelical kind of way. If you ask most of them whether they believe in the divinity of Christ or His saving work on the cross, they wouldn't dispute or deny it, most of them. But when you go into their churches, that is not what you hear. Or if you hear it, it is in such disguised ways because they're trying to appeal to consumers. Now, I think they are in a real bind, because the method that they have adopted is simply deaf on Christian faith. So they've got to make a choice, and I think the choice is now upon them, and I think Bill Hybel's study only pointed this out. The time to choose has come. Either they go the marketing way, in which case there is nothing to stop any compromise at all, or they turn back and recover their true Biblical identity.

**WILKEN:** Joe in St. Louis has a question about Christian education. He says, "What has been the impact of these trends on our Christian schools, and what is the remedy to combat these influences?"

**WELLS:** Well, of course, some of our Christian schools are trying to train kids to think Christianly about their world, Christianly and Biblically, in a way that you don't see in the typical mega-church. So some of our Christian schools are, by their very nature, sort of countercultural, both in terms of the culture and the evangelical world. But for those young people who are growing up in these mega-churches, I can tell you that they are Biblically and morally illiterate. When Christian Smith did his recent study on them, he summed it up by saying, and he researched a wide swath of young people in churches of an evangelical kind, and he said their belief is in a theism—that is to say that God never interferes in this life—which is of a therapeutic kind. They're just interested in internal healing. And they don't have rules in their lives. So that's where we're headed.

**WILKEN:** With only thirty seconds, then, is the way forward really, in fact, the way back—that is, a return to the classical assertions, beliefs, and tenets of the Protestant Reformation? Thirty seconds, Dr. Wells.

**WELLS:** The way forward is the way back, but not simply to arid beliefs. These beliefs, we have to make our own. We have to feel their weight and their depth. We have to hold them in the tension that is always there in relationship to our culture. These have to be ours in the presence and the face of God.

**WILKEN:** Folks, when you purchase *The Courage to Be Protestant* using the Amazon.com link at our website, a percentage of your purchase will help support *Issues, Etc.* Just visit [issuesetc.org](http://issuesetc.org), click "On Demand," and look for *The Courage to Be Protestant* by Dr. David Wells. He's distinguished professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon Conwell



Theological Seminary, author of several books including *The Courage to Be Protestant*.  
Dr. Wells, it's always a pleasure. Thank you.

**WELLS:** Thank you so much.

**WILKEN:** Rebecca in Michigan, Steve in St. Louis, send us an email with your mailing address and we'll send you the book, *The Courage to Be Protestant*. Thanks to everybody who called and who emailed, as well.

The way forward is the way back. It always has been. We are recalled by the apostles to their teachings, and the earliest church spends the better part of its time recalling the teachings of the apostles: the way back. To what? Well, it's the way back to the heart and center, the living, vital, the beating heart of the Christian faith and of the Church itself; the way back to Christ and His cross. Would that evangelicalism lived up to its name: men and women of the Gospel. But one of the first casualties in evangelicalism's attempt to find success in the eyes of the world—and boy, have they found success in the eyes of the world—one of the casualties was the Gospel itself. It had to go. And so when you walk into many of those churches you simply will not hear it sung, prayed, preached, or even mentioned. It's considered a scandal. Well, that's because it *is* a stumbling block. And yet it is the only message that saves a lost and condemned world: the message of Christ, perfect life, death, and resurrection for us. And the way forward for the Church is *always* the way back to Christ and His cross, to the bold proclamation and confession of the Christ and of His apostles, of the Church, as it has stood the test of time and against the gates of hell, because of that confession of Jesus Christ, crucified for a world of sinners, and is the only hope for that world. Now, the Church will survive, make no mistake about it. Evangelicalism may have already fallen, and may already be nothing more than dust. But Christ's promise, the gates of hell will not prevail, remains for the true Church as it continues to confess Christ.

I'm Todd Wilken. Talk with you again tomorrow. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.*

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*Issues, Etc. Transcript – “The Decline of American Evangelicalism” – page PAGE 10*