



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Christ-centered Higher Education that Impacts the World with Truth – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. Donald Sweeting

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: In the founding of the Western university and the great American universities, the model was competence, character, Christ-centered faith. Even Harvard, Oxford, they took away the Christ-centered faith part and they whittled it down to, oh, we still believe in character and competence, but guess what? They've taken the character part out. Harvard will explicitly say we don't teach that, we don't even hire for that because we can't agree on what it is. So then they're down to competence. Now you can get good technical training at some of these schools, but remember, Germany was the most educated nation in the world when Hitler came to power. Competence on its own could lead you into really challenging places. You need character and you need a basis for that. And so that's where a truly convictionally Christian college offers you much more.

Roger Marsh: You're listening to Family Talk. And that was the voice of Dr. Donald Sweeting, chancellor and former president of Colorado Christian University, and also the co-chair of the Western Conservative Summit. I'm Roger Marsh. And today on Family Talk, we are sharing the second half of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with Dr. Sweeting on the value of Christ-centered higher education. Yesterday the two discussed how important it is for Christian colleges and universities to be truly rooted in God's Word and in the historical tenants of the Christian faith. On today's program, Dr. Clinton and Dr. Sweeting will talk about the threats that many Christian colleges are facing from a godless culture as a result of their commitment to their faith and their conservative values. Today's interview is also the final installment in our back to school week lineup here on Family Talk. I hope that you've been encouraged by the programming that you've heard here, education centric as it has been. And if you missed any of the programs, including part one of Dr. Clinton and Dr. Sweeting's conversation from yesterday, visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

Now, before we get into today's conversation, let me introduce you once again to Dr. Clinton's guest. Dr. Donald Sweeting is the chancellor of Colorado Christian University, and also co-chair of the Western Conservative Summit. He previously served as president of CCU from 2016 to 2022. Prior to his time at

CCU, he was president of Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, where he was also professor of church history. In addition to his roles in academia, Dr. Sweeting also served for 12 years as the senior pastor of Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church in Greenwood Village, Colorado. Dr. Sweeting is a graduate of Lawrence University, where he earned his bachelor's degree in history, and also earned a master's at Oxford University. He then went on to receive his doctorate in historical theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Dr. Sweeting and his wife, Christina, have three adult sons and one daughter. Now, what you're about to hear was recorded just outside of Denver, Colorado at the Western Conservative Summit earlier this year. Let's join Dr. Clinton and Dr. Sweeting right now on this edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yesterday, delightful conversation about what's happening in our Christian colleges and universities. We are here at the Rocky Mountain Gaylord Resort, Denver, Colorado, at the Western Conservative Summit. It's actually put on by the Centennial Institute at Colorado Christian University.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dr. Sweeting, you spoke this morning there. Tell us a little bit about the event, what's happening? Why are these people gathered together?

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah, so Bill Armstrong, my predecessor, who had a great background in politics started the Western Conservative Summit. And he started a public policy institute called the Centennial Institute at CCU. And the summit comes under the Centennial Institute. And basically as a university, we are unapologetically Christian, but we're also a conservative Christian university. And we're not embarrassed by that, we're not moving away from that, we're leaning into that. And so we put on this large summit, this is a big tent event that brings in many conservative leaders and speakers and activists once a year. And it's been the second largest gathering of conservatives in the United States outside of CPAC. And we're in the West. So we're very far from the swamp, another part of the country.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, I have to say, Denver's not a bad place to put down some roots and go to college for sure.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Right off the foothills of those Rocky Mountains, they're actually stunning.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: We love Colorado.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So beautiful. Dr. Sweeting, yesterday, we touched toward the end of the broadcast on the real threat to Christian colleges and universities, how they're really in the cross hairs of a lot of animus. There's some real hatred out there. It's so strong that people would like to see, I really believe would like to see

Christian colleges and universities go the way, if you will. Dr. Sweeting, we talked about the lawsuit with the department of justice. I think it was called Hunter v. The United States Department of Education, and identified that CCU and other Christian college and universities like Liberty were all named in that lawsuit. I know that it's been tamed down a little bit, but at the same time, there's a lot of push to come against schools and to challenge them. And we're seeing even program accreditation issues begin to surface now and push back against programs, which by the way, also are a threat to these schools. And the potential of loss of federal funding is a real threat that could wipe out a lot of Christian colleges and universities.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah. Would it wipe it out? I don't know how God would redirect it. It would be fundamentally different if we lost those funds and lost accreditation. Keep in mind that, in other parts of the world where they've had all kinds of political challenges, my wife's grandmother for instance, grew up in the Ottoman Empire and they would go out in the fields to do their education at night. So, I don't want to be completely-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Ah, got it. We serve a sovereign God, you bet we do.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: But here are the levels-

Dr. Tim Clinton: This is serious. It's not play.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: This is very, very serious. So serious. So for example, when I was considering whether to become president, I called up one of the Christian leaders in higher education, I'm not going to say his name. And he said, "Well, you need to pray about this because this is not a great time for Christian schools. We probably have five years left." That was what was said to me. So pray about it. And my wife and I prayed about it and we came back and then we said, okay, let's assume we have five years left. Because at that time, this was the summer of 2016. Let's assume we have five years left. Wouldn't you want to be part of the last generation to be able to hold the flag up? Yes, but who knows what God will do? Who knows what God will allow and how God will work?

Well, it turns out we had this window open up in Christian education and Christian liberty with the Trump administration that was extraordinary, their support for religious liberty. But there are different levels that the challenge comes to us on. So, you have what you'd mentioned the congressional level with the Equality Act, the LGBT supremacy act basically. Then you have the regional accreditors that you have to deal with who in the last six years of my presidency threatened to change the rules so that we would have to bend to that whole agenda. And we had to fight that.

And then on top of that, you have executive orders that come from the president through the department of education or the office of civil rights. Then

on top of that, you have the state legislatures. So California, a number of years ago, dealt with this awful HB 1146 that was going-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Saw that.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: ... that was a challenge to all Christian colleges in California.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That was unreal.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: And then along with that, you have all the local licensing groups, license teachers, license doctors, license-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Therapists.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: ... therapists, who take their signal from all these other things. So the challenges come on many different levels. That's what we're dealing with. I was talking to Barry Corey, who's the president of Biola. And he said to me, "Don, I never realized that almost half my time would be defending our right to exist. I'm a Christian educator. I wanted to give myself to that, but I have to spend half my time defending our right to exist. This never happened to Christian college presidents." And I would say that's very, very true. I don't even know if our boards understand that, but that's the reality of what it's been like in the last six years.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I want to read a statement from the Alliance Defending Freedom, senior council, Ryan Tucker. Ryan wrote these words, "Targeting religious schools hurts the students and families who desire to pursue their education in places that share their faith and values. These schools should be allowed to defend their, and their students long recognized freedoms under federal law and the First Amendment." Couple of bottom line pieces that came out of that document. One, schools should be allowed to exercise their religion without being discriminated against by the government. So that's a big statement.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And then the second one was, financial aid should not be stripped from students just because they choose to attend a religious school. That's critical.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah. It's very critical.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's the battleground that we're up against. And most Christians, I agree with you, most Christian leaders believe that we're just beginning to see the storm that's actually brewing, and we've got our hands full in front of us and we need to come together. This is not a time for silo work out there. This is a time for us to collaboratively come together and for people of faith to stand boldly and be emboldened and be courageous and say, "Look, we're just wanting the

opportunity to exercise our faith, to hold onto our sincerely held religious beliefs.”

Dr. Donald Sweeting: And to exercise our First Amendment rights. Our Constitution guarantees us, but here's the thing, there are a lot of people on the left, they don't care about the Constitution. They don't care about the First Amendment. They're redefining it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: They are. Well, we certainly, at this particular point, want to challenge those who are listening to be in prayer earnestly and be active, mobilize even in your local communities, and understand how serious this educational threat is.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah. Be active. Get involved in your city council elections, get involved in your school board because so many conservatives aren't, and they leave the door, they leave it open for everybody else to come in there. And then we get these wacko policies that happen. We've talked about the challenges and they're so formidable, especially in religious liberty, but I don't want anybody to miss the immense opportunities for Christian higher education right now. They're great, especially as the secular university is being ruined by all this politically correct stuff, Jesus Christ is life. And when you honor Him and put Him at the center, life flows from Him. He's the bread of life, the word of life, the living water.

So the opportunities for Christian higher education are extraordinary. The reason we're having record enrollments, part of it is that people are looking for a sane education and they're trying to find it. And they're having a hard time finding it. And many are looking for a faith based education. And, of course, in Christ, as Colossians 2 says, "Are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." So that's why it's crazy when Christian colleges move away from that out of embarrassment, I'm thinking don't lose your sanity too.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Julie and I were so serious about it. We both went through Liberty, undergrad and grad school. Our daughter, Megan wanted her to go to Liberty. She met her husband while going through Christian Ed. My son, Zach, had him go through Liberty. Megan went on to PA school and became a PA and specializes in dermatology. Zach went on and got his master's degree in counseling. He's going on to get his PhD in counselor education, anchored strong in the faith. And we know that doesn't happen all the time, but this is about an opportunity to culture and strengthen them because I'll tell you what, it's a big, bad world out there. And the ability to think through socialism, Marxism and all this craziness that's going on, it's difficult for people to see through. But if you haven't been taught and you haven't been rooted, you're going to be tossed to and fro like Paul said.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah, that's so true. That's so true. And that's where Christian education does provide roots. We teach about all these other views, but we also give them reason for why a Christ-centered worldview makes more sense of the world.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You bet. And mom and dad, don't miss this. Your input is valued by your kids. Some of you may push back and say, no, my kids don't want... No, you're kidding. They're constantly watching everything you say and do. And they want to know whether or not you are anchored.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And that's a big deal. Do you see that at Colorado Christian?

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Oh, I do. I do. Let me just say a word to moms and dads too. I'm a dad. We have four children. Sometimes we refer to the school we went to as our Alma mater. You've heard that phrase?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: You know what that means? It's Latin for nurturing mother. The vision was that, okay, parents raise their kids and you pass them on and you entrust them to a school to be like a nurturing mother to continue what you've done. Well, that vision has been betrayed in so many places. Where it's not it's, we're going to tell you why your parents were crazy and why everything you've learned was wrong. And so that is not our vision at CCU. And that was not the vision of a university, but that's what has come about.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dr. Sweeting, I wanted to ask you a little bit about mental health on college campuses. When kids were coming to college 20 years ago, a little different than what you see today. There's a lot of brokenness out there, last couple of years have been really rough. Mental health issues are just... We don't have a crisis, we have an absolute disaster going on. And this is where culture becomes really important, because if everything's nothingness, there's nothing to hold onto. There's nothing to grab onto. There isn't. And that's why culture on these campuses become critical. They aren't going to be the end all, but they certainly have influence. And your goal is to provide an opportunity for them to nurture and grow in their relationship with God in Christ.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah. You just said something I think is really striking Tim. You said if everything is nothingness. So I don't understand all the dimensions of the mental health crisis, but I think I understand a few of them. And one dimension of it is if you have a worldview that believes in nothingness, nihilism.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yes.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: That's a downer for a kid in the first place. Life came from nothing, life goes to nothing, life has no meaning. William F. Buckley, before he died, described a lot of secular higher education as teaching "idiot nihilism." There's a belief that you came from nothing you're going to nothing. And because of that, it undermines your education. And you're basically an idiot. And that's a pretty potent phrase, but that's part of the mental health thing. That messes with your mind. And

then you add on top of that, the broken backgrounds that kids come from. And then you add on top of that, the social media obsession so that people are always comparing themselves, especially young girls. It's having a big effect as well, how it's shaping their minds. And there are other factors too, but we're not exempt from that. The kids who come to us are not exempt from that. We have to deal with that as well.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. And I don't want to say, and I don't want to get mail on this, that you guys are saying that all the colleges and universities are out there bad.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: No.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And my kids went to a state school and they're doing really well. And we get all that. We understand that. Thank God for those kids. But what we're saying is we want this opportunity to exist because there are some who need and want this kind of culture. And we're just trying to defend the right for that to happen. Let me go a step further with this. There is a real censorship and suppression going on, on a lot of state campuses where you're not allowed to be Christian. You can't even start groups on those colleges and universities. That's real stuff.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Well, and it's worse than that. At Yale, this past Yale Law School, they were having a bipartisan debate on one issue and they had conservatives and progressives and the whole thing was shut down. So they wouldn't even allow that debate to take place. And that's where I come back and say, there's more freedom at a Christian college to have debates like that. It's crazy. Our debate team's doing really well. Why? Partly because debate is shutting down across campuses across the country, which is really sad. It's not supposed to be that way.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. To the issue of parenting, Mom and Dad, you matter so much and don't ever give up on it. Even if you feel like your kids are wayward or they're not watching or respecting a lot of who you are or what you're going through. But Dr. Sweeting, your dad, George Sweeting, former president, chancellor of Moody Bible Institute. He was also senior pastor at the great Moody Church there in Chicago from 1966 to 72. Tell us about being raised as your father's son and what it has done in you.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: I just want to say, so everybody has an accurate understanding. The bottom line of all of our lives is God's grace. And my dad came from a family. His mom was abused. His dad despaired. He came out of World War I, and they met Jesus and it changed their lives. It changed the trajectory of their lives. It created a new foundation. And so my dad was the inheritor of that legacy. And I'm the inheritor. And just so, parents you are building a legacy and it takes place over generations.

So yeah, my dad was raised in a Christian home and his parents were converted through a ministry, started by DL Moody in Scotland. And so it was a crazy thing.

But then his dad, when they immigrated, they said go to Mr. Moody's school in Chicago. So my dad went to Moody Bible Institute and then eventually they asked him to come back and to be president. So he just went full circle on that. He is 97 years old. He's alive, both my parents, 95 and 97.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What a gift.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: They're going to be celebrating their 75th wedding anniversary.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Come on. How beautiful that is that?

Dr. Donald Sweeting: He finished a writing a book called *Full Circle* that was published by Moody Press, that tells a bit of the story of his life as well.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We know in counseling families tend to reproduce themselves, it's multi-generational flow. And what a beauty it is. Hey, off mic you had mentioned that your dad actually met Winston Churchill.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah. So, in 97, so he is almost a hundred years old. So he's had a lot of interesting history, when he was a boy he remembers Thomas Alva Edison walking in a parade in his hometown, in New Jersey. In his first church, he had somebody who was converted under Moody's ministry and Spurgeon's ministry. So we're not that far away from that, but in the 19, it was 1953, he was over in Britain doing meetings after the war, evangelistic meetings. And he went with some of his friends to 10 Downing Street where the prime minister lives. And in those days, I can remember some of those days where you could walk up to the door of 10 Downing Street, there weren't barricades.

And he walked up to the door, there was an English bobby there. And my dad said, "We're here to see the prime minister." And the bobby went in. And I think this, at this point, Churchill was in his second term of office. His popularity was down in Britain, but he knew Americans loved him. And so out walks Winston Churchill. And Churchill commented, "And I can tell you're Americans because of your hats." And my dad had done an impersonation of him. And so he asked to see the impersonation and it was a moment that they never forgot.

Dr. Tim Clinton: How beautiful.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: While you were telling the story, I was just thinking about the significance of being faithful. If we'll be faithful, you never know what God's doing. He may be raising up, in that little family of yours in Kalamazoo, Michigan, the next Luther or Wesley, or Churchill, or what have you, Dobson. Only Heaven will tell. But our job is to be faithful stewards of the trust that God's given to us. And in these hours, that sometimes means being courageous, stepping up and saying, "We're not going to let that happen on our watch." Dr. Don Sweeting has been our

special guest. It's been such a delight as president of Colorado Christian University. Dr. Sweeting, I want give you the closing word. I want you to speak to those moms and dads, those perspective students and speak to us as the body of Christ for such a time as this.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Well, Jesus said the wise man built His house upon a rock and the foolish man builds His house upon the sand, and Jesus is a rock. And whether you're a parent building a home or your family, or you are a student and you're getting ready for your career, Jesus Christ is life. And if you build on Him, you will have substantive foundation and He will lead you in a good place. And if you ignore Him, it's not stable. And I would just point to Him. My life was changed by Him. My dad's life was changed by Him. CCU exists because of Him. The great universities exist because of Him. So don't ignore Him. Even though the world says, look in another direction, come back to Him. He is that rock.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And He is our hope. My dad told me in one of my last conversations with him, he said, "Tim, follow Him with your whole heart. I promise you, you'll be blessed."

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And he also closed with these words. He said, "Tim it's because of Him, I'll see you again.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Great hope.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dr. Sweeting, what a delight. Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule, especially here at the Western Conservative Summit to join us. If people want to find out more again about you and Colorado Christian, where can they go?

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Go to ccu.edu. We have a traditional undergraduate school. We have adult school called College of Adult and Graduate Learning. We have a graduate school and we also have an academy for high school students so that you can work online and get credit. So wherever you're at in your educational journey, if you're retooling or starting out, check us out.

Dr. Tim Clinton: On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, their family, the entire team. Again, we tip the hat to you and pray God's special blessings over you and that great institution, Colorado Christian University.

Dr. Donald Sweeting: Thank you, Tim. And thank you for your good work.

Roger Marsh: Proverbs 4:7 says, "The beginning of wisdom is this, get wisdom, though it cost you all you have, get understanding." One of the ways that we as Christians can worship and obey the Lord is by learning more about Him and more about His Word. This is where Christian colleges and universities come in. Is a degree from

a Christian college required for a follower of Christ? Well, not at all, but investing in a Christian higher education is often an extremely good use of your time and your money. You've been listening to Family Talk. And that was the second half of Dr. Tim Clinton's interview with Dr. Donald Sweeting, chancellor and former president of Colorado Christian University. Now to learn more about Colorado Christian University or Dr. Donald Sweeting, visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk, or give us a call at (877) 732-6825.

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Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.