



Issues, Etc.TM

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TRANSCRIPT

Rev. Todd Wilken, Host

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"American Revivalism"

Guest:

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WILKEN: You look out on the religious landscape of modern-day United States, and you see a predominantly Christian group of people. Their practices, they don't seem that odd to us. Now, granted we don't think much about Christian history prior to the founding of our nation, if we think that far back at all. But does American Christianity represent historic Christianity in its beliefs, in its practices? How big a factor has American Revivalism been—that almost uniquely American thing—the revivals of the earlier centuries of our history? How

influential have they been on Christianity in America today?

Greetings, and welcome to *Issues, Etc.* on this Martin Luther King Day. It's Monday, January 17. I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in. Joining us for the next hour to talk about American Revivalism: Dr. Larry Rast. He's Professor of Historical Theology and Academic Dean at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Larry, welcome back.

RAST: Thank you, Todd. It's wonderful to be here with you.

WILKEN: Let's start this way. How old are the common Evangelical practices like altar calls, the sinner's prayer, and crusade evangelism?

RAST: Well, relatively speaking, they are innovations—very, very recent innovations—in terms of the broad sweep of the Church's history. And by that I mean pushing back about two hundred years or so is really when you see the first emergence of things like the classic revivals, as we know them today, and altar calls and the sinner's prayer and that sort of thing. And put into the larger sweep, then, of Church history, as I was saying, those are relatively new in terms of their appearance, but also in terms of the theology that lies behind them.

WILKEN: What's the relationship between these practices and the theology that lies behind them and the 19th century revivalist Charles Grandison Finney?

RAST: Charles Grandison Finney is, as anybody who knows me knows, a person that I believe is of the utmost importance in the history of the church because of the way he brought these innovations, both theological and practical, belief and practice, into the mainstream life of the church, especially here in the United States initially, but then in helping move those as kind of the chief export of American Christianity to world Christianity, even down to the present. Without Finney we don't have the same kind of story for American Christianity nor for world Christianity. And to me that may not be the best thing to be able to say, because some of the things that Finney was advancing, some of the positions to which he held, they were just—well, to put it bluntly—problematic when compared to what the Scripture teaches.

WILKEN: American Revivalism isn't just one thing. It actually came upon us historically in several stages. Compare, if you would, the Second Great Awakening, with which Finney is associated, to the First Great Awakening, largely associated with Jonathan Edwards.

RAST: Yeah, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, to a lesser degree the Wesley brothers, John and Charles. The character of the Second Great Awakening, which really emerged in an observable way after the turn of the century from the 1700s to the 1800s, the character of the Second Great Awakening was fundamentally differing, both in terms of doctrine and practice from that of the First Great Awakening. First Great Awakening, we back up to about 1730-1735, and getting into that range, when amongst the Calvinist theologians and preachers, both in Europe and here in the United States, you had a sense of, well, that word itself, "awakening," being at the heart of things, and for a person to be awakened, theologically speaking, at this point in time meant that God was doing something in their life. And typically the way God would awaken the sinner was through the proclamation of the Law, and that Law would then drive a person to the point of despair, and they would then wait upon God for a manifestation of mercy. And what you hear in this regard in respect to the First Great Awakening is an emphasis always on the actions of God. Now, those actions of God are clearly understood in a Calvinist sense – the sovereignty of God being protected, God as both the actor, the doer of all things, and the sinner being the passive recipient of those things. But in all things God being the One who acts, God being the One who does, either for the good of the sinner or for the ill of the sinner, as the case may be in respect to their reprobation.

With the Second Great Awakening the actor changes. The primary actor, the person to

whom Finney would appeal, and the other revivalist preachers would appeal, would be the sinful subject, the individual who would hear the preaching of the Law and then be told, “Now, you must—you yourself—must do something. Don’t wait upon God. Do something now, because God demands this of you. And the time is short. And if you do not act, you may find yourself in Hell, within the next few minutes, and the only person you’ll have to blame in that respect will be yourself.”

WILKEN: So how would you characterize, in a nutshell, the theological shift that took place between the First and Second Great Awakenings?

RAST: We like to put it technically as a shift from the older Calvinism to the new Arminianism. But to put it a little bit differently, it’s a shift from an emphasis on God as actor and doer in all things to that of the human subject. It’s a move, in other words, once more, from divine monergism, where God alone is working, to decision theology, where the human subject becomes the primary actor.

WILKEN: I want to get into Finney’s theology, but let’s approach it by way of his practice, if you will. They were referred to at the time as “new measures,” both by Finney and by his critics. What were they?

RAST: The “new measures” were simply practices that Finney developed, himself in some cases or other existing practices that had been used in various revivals over time, that Finney and others then systematized into a program that would effect hearers and worshipers in revival settings and kind of, if you will, soften them up for the appeal, or the plea, that the preacher would make to them. And for Finney, he would argue Biblically, at least in his mind – I disagree – but he would argue on the basis of the Bible that the Church had always used “new measures,” had always been innovative in developing practices that would capture the

attention of audiences. So, for example, in his revival lectures of 1835, Finney would say in respect to Christian baptism that *had been* a new measure. Baptism was an innovation that the Church developed to capture the attention of people and tell them what it was that was required of them. So, for example, when Peter is preaching and the people cry out, “What must we do?” he says to them, “Be baptized.” And for Finney, that’s a moment of newness. This is an innovation. This is a new measure that, then, Peter and the other Apostles will use as a means of motivating people to action, motivating people to giving themselves to God. However, then, says Finney, over the course of Church history, these things – what had been innovations, what had been new measures – now have become old and formal and stuffy. And we need, therefore, always to be incorporating new measures, new practices, new kinds of activities that capture the attention of people. Because if we don’t have new measures, if we don’t have innovations, people will get bored, they’ll get ritualistic, they’ll get formalistic, and we won’t be able to hold their attention anymore. The preaching of the Gospel, in other words, is not enough. We need something to get people fired up. And those are the “new measures.”

WILKEN: Okay. I know you’re talking about Charles Grandison Finney, but this could be any church growth preacher, prominent, obscure, nowadays. Is there a connection?

RAST: Absolutely. There is no question about it. Historically speaking, you can draw the line of people who adopted this kind of perspective. And Finney, again, was not alone in the 19th century in this regard. What he is greatest at is systematizing the program, if you will. But historically speaking, his approach has made its way down to the present, and, in fact, his revival lectures continue to be in print even at the present time and continue to be enormously influential in the church even today.

WILKEN: With only about thirty seconds or so, can we say – would you say, as an historian, looking at it from that perspective – that what many Christian congregations receive by way of kind of the heritage of American Christianity, American Revivalism, they receive it as though it were handed down from the Church historic. Do they do this unwittingly, not knowing that these things introduced by Charles Finney, are innovations and unknown before his time?

RAST: Yes, absolutely. And that's kind of a natural human response to have. You know, history begins with the moment of my birth. And so if something's in place when I'm growing up, I think, "Well, that's the way it's always been." And we Americans, particularly lacking a critical faculty that's rooted in history, have been very open to receiving these things without criticism, without looking at their roots, their theological impact, and the like. And the result is, we just think that's the way it's always been.

WILKEN: All right, when we come back, we'll talk about the theology of American Revivalism, especially that of Charles Grandison Finney. What did he believe about man, about God, about conversion, about the nature of Christ's death for sinners? We'll answer all those questions with Dr. Larry Rast. We're talking about American Revivalism on this Monday, January 17.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. Well, I think if you listen to this conversation, what you see in American Christianity today comes into much clearer focus. You don't sit there saying, "Why do they do that?" or "Why are they praying that?" Suddenly there seems to be a logic at work here, even though those in American Christianity, pop-Christianity, may not even acknowledge the logic themselves. They may not be aware of the history. That's what

we're talking about with Dr. Larry Rast—"American Revivalism."

You mentioned before that the theology of Charles Finney, who's responsible for so much of this, deviated in serious ways from historic Christianity and Holy Scripture. Let's begin with the nature of man, according to Finney.

RAST: Yeah. Finney had really imbibed the Enlightenment perspective on human beings, almost to the fullest of the brim in terms of adopting this perspective. He believed that human beings had incredible, enormous potential and the thing that had been most responsible for dragging human beings down, and, in fact, encouraging them to sin, was the teaching of original sin. For Finney there really was not original sin in the sense of, as we like to put it technically, the imputation of the sin of Adam to all of his progeny. Rather, for Finney, it was primarily a matter of act. Sin is only in the act, and that act is limited to those of a reasonable frame of mind. So, in other words, what we often times today call the "age of accountability" had deep roots in Finney's theology too. That is to say, if you couldn't understand that you were sinning, you didn't sin. And that meant until at some point in your life, when you came to the age of reason, when you came to the age of accountability, you really weren't a sinner. So there was no sense of original sin. There wasn't a state of sin into which human beings were born, despite what the Scriptures clearly say about us being conceived and born in sin. Finney said, "No, sin is a willful, reasonable act on the part of a rational subject, and until that person is rational, they cannot, therefore, sin." Their actions may be sinful, but they are not themselves sinners as such. However, we all come to that point, or at least those of us who develop naturally, come to that point, and only then can we be described as truly sinful. And it just stands to reason, then, that if we are the ones who willfully and

rationally sin, it's our responsibility also to correct the implications and effects of that sin in our life.

WILKEN: So man is not born in need of a Savior? That simple?

RAST: It's just that simple. Exactly.

WILKEN: Okay, then, let's talk about the nature of that Savior. He had a very peculiar theory here. What is Jesus doing on the cross, according to Finney?

RAST: Well, and it's not just what He's doing on the cross; it's what He's doing throughout His life, in terms of His active obedience as well as His passive obedience. The Scriptures are clear on this point, that Jesus, in terms of His work on behalf of humankind—sinful humankind—on the one hand, actively fulfills the law of God in our place, that He was like unto us in all things except sinning—the Scriptures are very clear on that point—and as a result one aspect of His work on our behalf is to keep the law in every jot and tittle, to keep the law in its entirety on our behalf, because we ourselves cannot do that. We simply cannot achieve that. And that's a reality from the moment of our conception. It's a reality to the point of our death, that we are sinners in both the sense of being guilty of the original sin but also of committing actual sin.

For Finney, this is not the case. It's simply a matter of Jesus fulfilling the law for His own sake. That is to say, as a naturally born human being, Jesus had to keep the law. That was a requirement that God made of Him, and so Jesus had to do that for Himself.

Secondly, when it comes to the passive obedience of Christ, that is, His suffering and death on our behalf, Finney rejects that as well. The heart and center of the Christian Gospel message that Jesus died to pay for our sins once and for all, Finney rejects this out of hand. In fact, in a sermon

unhappily titled, "Justification by Faith," Finney says that anybody who believes that Christ made atonement, paid the price for human sin, really paid the ransom on behalf of another, is holding to a false position that's not supported by reason or Scripture. Rather, what Jesus was doing on the cross was demonstrating for humankind the anger that God holds over human sin. He was, if you will, satisfying God's public justice. We often call this a "moral government theory" of the atonement, where the death of Christ demonstrates God's anger over sin. But it also shows, in Finney's way of thinking, that human beings have the capacity themselves, therefore, to make atonement, if you will, according to his scheme, for their own sins. So once again, and this flows exactly out of his doctrine of man, if you are responsible for committing the sinful action in the first place, you are equally responsible for correcting the sinful action in the second place. And you cannot look to Christ as the one who has paid for that sin for you or fulfilled the law on your behalf. Rather, what Jesus effectively becomes is an example that you may follow in order to placate the wrath of God over your own sin. Jesus becomes kind of the great object lesson that offers us the possibility of re-approaching God. If He can do it, you can do it too.

WILKEN: I imagine many in pop-American Christianity today, who are the theological descendants of Charles Finney, whether they know it or not, would be shocked to realize that the things that they practice as a matter of course that come from Finney are rooted in a theology that denies the vicarious atonement.

RAST: I think you're absolutely right, Todd. In fact, you can hear the tension inherent in popular preaching even down to the present on this particular point. Take, for example, probably the best-known advocate of some of Finney's practices, Billy Graham, for example, who preaches very clearly the

vicarious atonement, at various times in his preaching. He'll point to the blood of Christ being shed for the sins of humankind and the like, and in so doing really creates a kind of disjuncture with then what he follows up with in his own preaching. That is, Christ has shed His blood to pay for your sins once and for all, the price has been paid, the act is finished; now all you have to do is give yourself to Jesus. And so therein lies the tension. Finney would say, "Absolutely, you have to do these things," but in a way he's more logically consistent in saying that that carries itself out. That theme of necessity and obedience on the part of the human subject is part and parcel of what it means to give yourself to Christ. Whereas Billy Graham and other crusade preachers try to divvy that up, nuance that in a way, if you will, in a way that ends up being rather inconsistent in the end.

WILKEN: So, bring the two together in kind of the conversion theology of Charles Grandison Finney and American pop-Evangelicalism—man's natural state, a denial of original sin, and then, in Finney's case an explicit denial of the vicarious atonement; in pop-American Christianity's case, an implicit denial. Bring them together.

RAST: Yeah. Well, what you end up with, as a result, is a theology that draws you away, once again, from the object of faith, which is, of course, Christ for us. The problem with this theology is that it really makes the human subject the final arbiter between salvation and damnation. It has little to do, if you will, ultimately with the work of Christ. That becomes, in Finney's case, simply an example; in crusade evangelism's case, primarily a plea. But in the end it's the human subject who must willfully act in order for the deal to be done. And probably the clearest explanation of this was put forth in the latter 19th century in the form of a little bulletin that went out, that was used widely and continues, in fact, to

be used, that said, Really it comes down to this: God has voted for your salvation; the devil has voted No; it's a tie, and your decision must break that tie. Your decision will decide the issue.

WILKEN: This emphasis on the act of my will as key to everything, does that then explain why the "anxious bench," why the sinner's prayer, why walking the aisle, why these things that all are designed to highlight and confirm my will is acting now.

RAST: It becomes the place where you locate the act of the will. And for Finney this stems from yet another rather interesting, I think, way of perceiving the human subject...

WILKEN: About one minute.

RAST: Okay. And what he says here, very clearly, is that human beings are sinners. In fact, for him all human beings do sin. They do commit sins. And the reason is that they're thrust into a social situation where they learn to sin. And so, naturally speaking but not theologically speaking, they sin. Ergo, therefore, if we want people not to sin, we should put them into a social setting that encourages them in the other direction, namely, towards God. Where do you do that? For him it's within the context of the revival, where you sing, pray, and plead with people to exercise their will in the right way, which is to choose God. Now, that sometimes can happen in a night. Some times it takes a month. Some times it takes six months. And so you have these long revivals that go on and on and on and on as the human subject is pointed and moved and manipulated towards God.

WILKEN: Dr. Larry Rast is our guest. We're talking about American Revivalism on this Monday, January 17. I'm Todd Wilken.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Dr. Larry Rast is our guest. He's Professor of Historical Theology and Academic Dean at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. We're talking about American Revivalism. Larry, the average person sitting in church today says, "This isn't so much revival. I mean, yes, it's *revivalistic*; it has that kind of feel to it. But there's a lot of teaching going on. I'm going to church not so much to be converted, but to be taught, instructed, in the Christian life, my walk with Jesus, if you will." Does that also have its roots in the revivalism of Finney?

RAST: Actually, it does. That strong emphasis on the sanctified life is very consistent with Finney's theology. Now, it's not unique to his theology. Once again, he, as he often does, picks up a theme from some earlier movements and then explodes it, if you will.

So, for example, in this case, we might even look back to some of the emphases of earlier Christian theologians, including some Lutherans, like Philip Jacob Spener and August Hermann Francke, just to name two (there are plenty of others), who argued that during the Reformation Luther and his coworkers had done a wonderful job of articulating the doctrine of justification by grace through faith because of Christ alone, but that they hadn't really finished the job, if you will, theologically speaking in respect to living the Christian life. And so Spener and Francke and Johann Arndt and, as I said, plenty of others began to emphasize the need for the transformed Christian life, that put a great amount of stress on the perfectability of the human subject. Now, to Spener's defense, he said we never achieve that point in this life. There's no person, because of the reality of sin, that can overcome sin in their lives entirely. It will be a life-long struggle for the Christian person. But just because there will be the reality of sin, we should not encourage sin, which Spener believed Lutheran preaching and

teaching about justification actually could do and in many cases, in fact, did do. So Spener said let's heighten our expectations of Christian people and challenge them and point them to works of service, believing that they can make quantifiable progress in their sanctified life. We can tell, that is to say, a person who is making some real progress in terms of fulfilling the will of God in their own lives.

This gets picked up by other theologians: Nicolas Luther von Zinzendorf, but perhaps more importantly, John Wesley, in the 1700s, who then emphasizes Christian perfectionism to an even greater degree than Spener and his colleagues did earlier on. In fact, it becomes a kind of capstone. Christian perfectionism becomes a capstone, if you will, in Wesley's theology. But, as is often the case with Finney, as I already alluded to, he takes that theme and then just blows it, if you will, and all out of proportion in respect to what had come before him, makes it rather central to his entire theology. Although in a way it's rather consistent with what he had been teaching before. Simply this, Finney will say, that if we believe that the human subject has the capacity innately, from birth, to do spiritually good works—they just have to be pointed and encouraged in that direction—why wouldn't we say that the person who progresses necessarily in sanctification can actually achieve a kind of sinless perfection in this life. It's at least a logical possibility, although it will be a challenge for most people to achieve it. However, says Finney, if we allow for preaching that excuses backsliding, that excuses sinfulness on the basis of the reality of original sin in this world and the like, then we're simply going to encourage people to sin. Therefore, our theme must always be go towards the good, go towards the good, go towards the good. The effect, theologically, is that it puts such an enormous emphasis on the actions, the willful actions, of the former sinner—and now I'm talking like Finney, not like Rast at

this point—but the willful actions of the former sinner, that the individual becomes completely consumed with themselves and their works and their actions and judging themselves and judging themselves over against others and the like, so that increasingly—and this happens within these movements, almost without fail this occurs—the kind of either a pharisaical assumption that one has achieved a level of Christian walk and Christian perfection that places one above others or in the most devastating of circumstances the Law does exactly what the Law should do and utterly crushes the individual and leads them into despair from which they cannot extricate themselves. The horrible thing, of course, being that in both of these cases the individual is looking at himself or herself and has ceased to look to Christ who has already paid the full price for human sin and has opened the doors of heaven to that person.

WILKEN: So it sounds like in the American context American Revivalism a la Finney found some pretty anxious recipients among the Pietists. I mean we're talking here about erring Lutherans in our history who had rejected much of what Lutheranism teaches in favor of, well, they would eventually be able to very nicely adopt what Finney was teaching.

RAST: It was a very easy transition for many of America's Lutherans, unfortunately, where they began to argue that, you know, on two counts really. One was a theological count, where they looked at Finney's proposals and said there's much truth here that we have to have the courage as Lutherans to adopt for ourselves, even recognizing that it runs contrary to what we as Lutherans have confessed since the time of the Reformation. And that gets to our second point, then, that namely these folks began to shift their understanding of Lutheranism away from a faithful confession of what the Scriptures have always taught to

emphasizing the Lutheran tradition as being an opportunity to develop and progress and frankly change theology as it needed to occur. It really steered Lutheranism in a very unhealthy direction.

WILKEN: You mentioned that Finney's theology and practices had one of two results, either kind of a pharisaical elitism, or this utter despair. After the Second Great Awakening has kind of done its work in certain sections of America, in particular in the northeast, what is the state of the church there?

RAST: That's a very good question, Todd. For years and years and years the northeast, the American northeast, has been considered to be one of the real devastated areas of Christian belief, but always chasing, if you will, chasing the tail of the northwest. Well, in the last few years, in fact, the northeast has achieved perhaps what it desired, sadly so. That is, it has become the most unchurched, the least Christianized area of the United States. And that was Finney's home base. It's striking to see the collapse, if you will, of Christianity in the American northeast in many ways.

On the other hand, it's not entirely surprising to a theologian and historian like me where if you've located Christianity completely in the moral actions of an individual and marginalized to a great extent the proclamation Christ and focus on Him as the Savior from sin, as the One who's kept the Law perfectly and paid the price once and for all – well, you're talking about human beings all the time; why do you need this religion thing in the end if you've already redefined sin in terms of action, at best, and then you have a society that redefines actions as it sees fit culturally speaking. As time goes by religion becomes less and less necessary, if you will, less and less compelling to people. And we've seen the chickens come home to roost, if you will, in the northeast today.

WILKEN: Dr. Larry Rast is our guest. We're talking about American Revivalism. When we come back, ten more minutes with Larry. We're going to talk not only about the immediate results of American Revivalism in the United States, but the ongoing existence of this thing. It has relocated itself from the revival tent to the megachurch. And although it sounds odd, there really isn't that much distance, historically or theologically, between, say, Joel Osteen and Charles Finney. They look different. They may sound different. But in a lot of ways without a Finney, we wouldn't have an Osteen. We'll talk about American Revivalism and the Church Growth Movement and what comes after it with Dr. Larry Rast. I'm Todd Wilken. The danger here that we face is that these errors, once in the bloodstream of American Christianity, are very difficult to get rid of. They remain in the system, they circulate and they wait for the proper opportunity to raise their ugly heads. We'll be right back.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: We're talking about American Revivalism. Dr. Larry Rast is our guest. Larry, let's talk a little bit about the immediate results of this. I have heard that in the wake of American Revivalism, the First and Second Awakenings, there was a void left religiously in the minds of the American population, again, particularly in the northeast, that paved the way for things like Mormonism, made-in-America religion.

RAST: Yeah. As a matter of fact, Joseph Smith was emerging as a significant religious figure here in the United States even as Charles Finney was, as was, a little bit later on, William Miller, who helped start the Seventh-Day Adventist tradition. It was a little bit removed from him, but there was a lot of theological and religious innovation that was bound up together with the revivalism of the 19th century. John Humphrey Noyes of the Oneida Community

was just a few miles away from where Charles Finney had his first revival, a big revival, just north of Rome, New York. So, there's an awful lot of religious and theological experimentation that's going on in connection with the revivals at this point in time. And one of the things that it produces, that Finney sees as a strength, really becomes in a lot of ways an enormous liability to the church, and that's this notion of innovation and "new measures."

Who's to say, in other words, what's a legitimate new measure and what's not? If something can capture the attention of people and get them interested in religion in general – and remember what Finney's religion is: largely a matter of obedience to the will of God – if that does the job, if something does the job, isn't that, then, a legitimate new measure, even if it means some very, very strange thinking on the part of Joseph Smith and the Mormons with their theological emphases, or some very, very strange thinking on the part of John Humphrey Noyes in respect to what he called "complex marriage" (in the '60s they'd call it "wife-swapping"), or if it's some very, very strange thinking on the part of William Miller and his millennialism and then as that develops in respect to Seventh-Day Adventism. The void that the demand for the new creates really allows almost anything to jump into the vacuum, to move into the vacuum.

WILKEN: Some of the most ardent critics of the new measures and of American Revivalism, those voices actually came out of a burgeoning American Lutheranism, kind of a second wave of American Lutheranism, in the middle of the 19th century, in particular from our theological ancestor, C. F. W. Walther. Why was he so deeply concerned about the influence of new measures and this theology on his own theology?

RAST: Yeah, that's a great point. And, of course, the little commercial: this week, later in the week, we'll be celebrating the life and ministry of C. F. W. Walther at our 34th Annual Confessions' Symposium. 2011 is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Walther, and our seminary here in Fort Wayne is recognizing him and his central role in not only the formation of the Missouri Synod, but his role as a confessional theologian in the United States in the 19th century. And that's where a huge part of Walther's genius really lies. He was often times criticized for being what was called a "restitution theologian," or as a "*zitatene Theologe*," "citation theologian." What Walther was trying to do in his own work as a professor, as a president, and especially as a preacher, was to present historic, Biblical Christianity as Lutherans rightly confessed it, which always had its center, its focus, in Christ. Christological—that's what Christianity is all about, and it is sacramental in Walther's thinking, and it is historical in Walther's thinking. And he says, "holding fast to what has first been given to us will keep us pointed in the right direction as the people of God, always having our center, of course, in Christ." These new measures, these new theological expressions, what they do is draw us away from the focus of our faith, the object of our faith, Christ, and point us to ourselves. And as soon as we make that move, we lose the basis of our salvation. We lose the assurance of our salvation. And we lose also the means of returning to those things, because we become infatuated with the new, the now, and, above all, ourselves.

WILKEN: You mentioned earlier Billy Graham, crusade evangelism. Billy Graham—there's no changing it, he's going to go down in American history as a major religious figure and, many people believe, kind of the standard of what Evangelicalism and evangelism ought to be. What word of caution, with all due respect to Dr. Graham,

what word of caution would you speak there to our listeners?

RAST: With all due respect, as you said, Todd, the problem of Billy Graham is the tension that I was discussing a little bit earlier, where he proclaims Christ, and the Gospel does come through in his preaching – there's no question about that – but then he obscures it with an appeal to the human subject and an act of the human will: You must now give yourself to Christ. That's Law, and the Law cannot produce spiritually good works. The work of the Law is to condemn us. It's to show us our sins. It's to crush us in terms of our own abilities to approach God and to make any appeal before God. We can't do it. But that simply, then, opens us to see Christ and everything He has done for us. To return to the Law, preaching of the Law, as Graham does in making a demand upon the willful act of the sinful individual – "Come to the altar, and give yourself to Christ" – distracts just as Finney's preaching did by turning the individual subject back to his own efforts.

WILKEN: Finally, then, historically, did American Revivalism revive American Christianity?

RAST: I don't...I don't think it did. And I say that with a little hesitation, as you hear it here, because on the one hand, there's no questioning the jump in numbers that the churches experienced in the wake of the Second Great Awakening. There is an increase in the number of people who joined churches, attend churches, are active in churches, and the like. But the kind of churches that they're attending and the theology and the practice of those churches is a theology and practice that centers in the appeal to the human will, human action, and obscures the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. It points people to their own works and their own deeds, rather than the completed work of Christ on their behalf. And as a result, it's difficult for me to say that Christianity was

revived. In fact, in many ways it laid the ground work for the kind of secularized emphasis on works of charity and mercy that are disassociated from the Christian faith that we characterized in culture today, and that don't have their center in Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen again on behalf of sinful human beings.

WILKEN: Dr. Larry Rast is Professor of Historical Theology and Academic Dean at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Larry, thank you very much for being our guest.

RAST: It's always my pleasure, Todd. Thanks for the opportunity.

WILKEN: What does revive the Church? Well, let's not just talk about revival, because the Church lives even as Christ lives. If Christ is alive, the Church is alive. We are His body. What keeps the Church alive? The Church lives by the very life of Christ Himself. The Church's life flows from the imperishable life of Jesus, our Savior, who died and has risen again, never to die again. That's how the Church lives. How is that life delivered to us sinners here in time

Sunday after Sunday? Through His Word, where Christ the life-giver, Christ who is our life, who is the Church's life, speaks life to us in the words of His forgiveness of our sins. His cross sets down as the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. He gives His Church life when He gives that rebirth in water and the Word, in the name of the Triune God—Baptism. He gives His Church life, He keeps His Church alive, by feeding her with His very living Body and Blood, laid down at the cross, taken up again in life in the resurrection. The Church's life flows from the very imperishable life of Jesus Christ, our Savior. You see, nowhere in that formula is your decision. Nowhere in that formula is a "new measure" to attract your attention. Nowhere in that formula are your efforts to somehow please God or keep the Law. The life of the Church is Christ's life. This is what keeps the Church alive. This is how the Church lives. It's how the Church has always lived. It's how the Church will always live. It is how the Church will live eternally, raised from the dead with Christ.

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

