

TRANSCRIPT

Rev. Todd Wilken, Host

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"Christless Christianity"

Guest:

Dr. Michael Horton

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Westminster Seminary, Escondido, CA**

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INTRO: “Sometimes I’ll teach very good sermons right out of the Scriptures that are essential to faith where I might not talk about Jesus in a sermon. It would fail your test. It’s all, maybe, David’s material, or Solomon’s material, or some of Moses’ material. And I think the standard needs to be more Bible-based rather than exclusively Christ-based.”

WILKEN: I wonder what St. Paul would make of that. Pastor Ted Haggard, past president of the National Association of Evangelicals saying not Christ and Him crucified, not nothing but Christ and Him crucified, but a bunch of other things besides Christ and Him crucified. In fact, broaden the message of Christianity to include David, Moses, and Solomon material, along with the very important Jesus material. I wonder what St. Paul would make of that—St. Paul who says, “I was determined to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified.”

Greetings and welcome to *Issues, Etc.* I’m Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in. We’re going to be talking about “Christless Christianity” for the whole next hour of the program with Dr. Mike Horton. We welcome your phone calls and your email, live this Wednesday afternoon. It’s the 15th of October. Give us a call right here: 1-877-623-MY-IE, 877-623-6943, or email us here in the studio: [HYPERLINK "mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org"](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org) talkback@issuesetc.org.

Dr. Mike Horton is a regular guest here on the program, Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California. He’s co-host of the national radio program *The White Horse Inn* and author of the new book, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*. Mike, welcome back.

HORTON: Todd, it’s always great to be back with you.

WILKEN: You write early in your book, “Judging by its commercial, political and media success, the Evangelical movement seems to be booming, but is it still Christian?” What do you mean by asking this question?

HORTON: Well, you know, “Christian” is used as an adjective a lot today. So we’ve got more Christian stuff than we’ve ever had. We’ve got Christian T-shirts and Christian cars and Christian insurance businesses and Christian sports. You name it; there’s a lot of Christian stuff. But go into an average Christian bookstore and see if you can find books on Christ, His person and work, and I think that you’d be hard pressed. I think the same is true, Todd, of the sermons, of the broadcasting, of the average diet that people in the pews get week after week, that invokes the name of Christ but really doesn’t talk about who He is or what He did or interpret the Bible from Genesis to Revelation with Him at the center.

WILKEN: You talk about an alternative Gospel that’s taking over pop-American Christianity. If the Gospel as Paul presents it to us, as it is outlined in the very life of Jesus presented in the gospels, His perfect life, His sacrificial death and resurrection for a world of sinners is the Gospel, what’s the alternative gospel of pop-American Christianity?

HORTON: (Laughter) You know, all kinds of things, all kinds of things. A lot of it is good. A lot of it is love your neighbor more, be a better husband, be a better wife, be more committed, read your Bible more, pray more, uh, transform the world, let’s turn it upside down for Christ, let’s ... more deeds, not creeds, let’s try to get out there and not just talk but walk the walk. I think that and countless other things could be listed as the diet. But the question really is, where is Christ being proclaimed week after week as the atoning sacrifice for sinners, not as the life-coach for people who need a better plan?

WILKEN: Okay. I cannot help but think ... you summarized the alternative gospel as basically, what, do more, try harder, keep busy kind of a thing.

HORTON: Yeah.

WILKEN: I cannot help but think back to Medieval Rome, where essentially prior to the Reformation this was the message people were getting in their churches all over Western

Europe—do more, try harder, keep busy.

HORTON: Yeah, in fact, I love that line in one of the Luther movies where Staupitz says to Luther, his confessor says to Luther, “Luther, you’re driving yourself crazy. You’re wearing me out in confession. Stop worrying so much about your soul and whether you’re going to be damned.” He says, “Just love God.” And at that moment, Luther, of course, famously says, “Love God? I hate Him.” And Luther had this profound sense from his close reading of Scripture, this very profound sense that he was like Isaiah, in chapter six of Isaiah, totally undone, that he had been in the presence of a holy God and was found stripped completely naked before His judgment, and he didn’t have anywhere to flee, he didn’t have anywhere to go. And he was sort of scraping his insides of his conscience out to try to clean himself up, until he finally realized that it was a righteousness not of his own that could make him appear well dressed in God’s court.

WILKEN: Mike, how did we get to this point where in the name of Christ the message of the cross is preached less and less and less, where it is the proclamation of the Christian rather than the Christ that predominates, perhaps even completely dominates, in many Christian pulpits, in song, in prayer in America today?

HORTON: Well, I think it starts.... One of the things I try to do in *Christless Christianity* is document that. You know, how do we go through these shifts? Because we don’t naturally believe that we are helpless and only Christ can save us. This is totally foreign to us, even as Christians. And so, if it isn’t the regular diet, it’s not as if we’re going to go on believing it anyway. But the church assumes that we will. The church assumes that we will go on believing that we are sinners justified by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. So the Gospel, first of all, becomes assumed. It’s the “Well, of course. Well, yeah, of course, we all believe that.” Then the next stage is, of course, the next generation doesn’t say, “Of course, we believe that.” They’re ignorant of that. And now really what they’re aware of is the other stuff that the church thought was more worthy of time and energy. And then finally you have another generation that explicitly rejects that inheritance. Well, I’ve just described a lot of our sort of dead confessional, conservative churches in the 1950s, the mega-church movement of the 1970s and 80s, and the emergent movement that is afoot today. It’s sort of like this transition from Saturday Night Live’s church lady to another Saturday Night Live character, Stuart Smalley. You know, first of all, you’ve got a church that is just uptight and legalistic and narrow-minded and dogmatic in the negative sense, just repeating clichés and formulas. Then, before you know it, reacting against that, the pendulum swings in the other direction, and nobody knows what they believe or why.

WILKEN: We’re talking about “Christless Christianity.” Dr. Mike Horton is our guest. Our in studio email address on this Wednesday, October the 15th: [HYPERLINK "mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org"](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org) talkback@issuesetc.org. Our call-in number: 1-877-623-MY-IE, 877-623-6943.

Here’s Steve calling from his car. Hi, Steve.

CALLER: Hi. First of all, I thoroughly enjoy *The White Horse Inn*. So, I enjoy listening to that every week.

HORTON: Thanks, Steve.

CALLER: Oh, you’re welcome. Hey, the question I have for you, and it’s kind of something I’ve been chewing on listening to the podcasts of *The White Horse Inn*, is could, in an indirect way, could the semi-Pelagian/Arminian theology that a lot of American Christianity holds on to, and the once-saved-always-saved mindset play into this? And where I’m coming from is that if you have the mindset once-saved-always-saved, well the Gospel is for the sinner, but now we gotta get the Christian back in right, so you don’t need to preach the Gospel, you preach the, you basically, inadvertently preach the Law.

WILKEN: Alright, Steve, thank you very much. Mike, you know, as a Lutheran and you as a Calvinist, we’re going to disagree on this once-saved-always-saved issue, but take a stab at

Steve's question.

HORTON: (Laughter) No, I think Steve is exactly right, and I don't think we disagree over once-saved-always-saved. We may disagree over the ... whether all those who are regenerate persevere, but I think perseverance of the saints is different from once-saved-always-saved. I think Steve's right that once-saved-always-saved implies, first of all, that we got saved by making a decision for Christ. And so, basically He's stuck with us, but He's stuck with us for the same reason people believe you can lose your salvation by your disobedience. You know, He's stuck with us because we did the one thing that was necessary in order for God to be stuck with us. Well, that's very different from believing that the Gospel that begins a good work in us will complete that work. But he's absolutely right. If we think that getting saved has to do with something that happened when I walked an aisle or prayed a prayer way back when and now let's get on to the interesting stuff of the Christian life....

WILKEN: Let's talk about that on the other side of the break, Mike. We're talking with Mike Horton. Stay tuned.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. Dr. Mike Horton is our guest. We're talking about "Christless Christianity." Dr. Mike Horton is Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California, co-host of the national radio show *The White Horse Inn*, author of a new book, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*. When we went to the break you were talking about this idea that if walking the aisle making my decision is how I believe that I brought myself to faith, in essence, then what emphasis will that put upon the Christian life and does that explain a lot of, I mean per Steve's question, explain a lot of what passes for "Christ-centered" preaching in American Evangelicalism?

HORTON: I think so. I think we've really lost this doctrine that is shared by Lutheran and Reformed traditions that salvation comes by the Word. You know, we think of the Word as maybe something that describes how people get saved or the Word is something, the Gospel in particular is something, that people can use in order to save themselves by following its instructions. But really the Gospel itself is the means the Spirit uses to bring us to faith. And if that's true, then the same faith that clings to Christ in the first instance needs to cling to Christ in every moment. Calvin had that great line where he said, "Christians need to hear the Gospel preached not only once in their Christian life, but throughout, each week, because," he said, "we are all partly unbelievers till we die." And that—every time I quote that in a broad Evangelical setting—people look at me first a little startled, like that's the craziest thing I've ever heard, and then about two seconds later following right behind it is a look of total recognition that this is how they feel but they didn't think it was right to say that out loud.

WILKEN: Daniel in Iowa emails this short question. He says, "Are the Pharisees a good example of "Christless Christianity," or are there any similarities between the two?"

HORTON: Yeah, in John 5 Jesus says to the Pharisees, "You know, you guys are very religious. You are very committed Bible people. But," He says, "you search the Scriptures diligently thinking that you have life in them, not realizing that it is they that testify concerning Me, but you will not come to Me in order to have life." When people say, as the clip suggested from the former president of the National Association of Evangelicals that they just preach the Bible, not necessarily Christ but they preach the Bible, and sometimes it's David and sometimes it's Moses and so forth. Jesus Himself said He is the material principle, He is the content, He is the point of the whole Bible. And then in Luke 24, after the Resurrection, He catches up with His dismayed disciples. They said, "Well we thought He was the one who would redeem Israel," and then Jesus opened up the Scriptures and showed them how everything in Moses and the Prophets was about Him. And they said, "Didn't our hearts burn within us?" as He opened up the Scriptures. The people's hearts are not burning within them as they hear the Scriptures opened because Christ is not recognized along the Emmaus road. Christ has become a means

to an end. He has become a memory that we appeal to in order to get our job done. Christ is no longer the Savior of the world and of the Church. In our churches Christ is not the point.

WILKEN: Why is it that many of the people who stress the importance of evangelism, reaching the lost, preach the Gospel the least?

HORTON: Yeah. You know, it's just amazing. It really is amazing to me. During the whole period now of the Church Growth Movement there has been a decline for the first time, since statistics were being kept, of real number in reported professions of faith. And then you look at the study that the Willow Creek Community Church conducted, saying, "Look our programs aren't doing the job we thought they were. The people who are most committed to Christ at Willow Creek are the least satisfied with their Christian growth, are even considering leaving Willow Creek." And they report that they wish they had deeper teaching of the Bible, better preaching, and more serious worship. And all that Willow Creek could take away from those statistics were, "See that proves that church isn't important for people who have been a Christian for a while. You get to a certain point where you just need to become your own pastor. You need to become self-feeders." Then the next step is George Barna telling us that since you go to church anyway just to find spiritual resources for your own ascent up the hill, you don't need to go to church for that. You can find resources online to help you sort of save yourselves with God's assistance. And that's true, of course, but none of these people are talking about grace as God's favor on account of Christ, which is delivered to us through preaching and sacraments. It's all about us. It's all about what we do. And I think that is the orientation that unites traditional approaches to worship in Evangelicalism, mega-church approaches, and emergent church approaches. For all of their differences, they're united by this common commitment to going to church in order to find a ministry, to do something, to serve the Lord, instead of receiving from the Lord so that they can go out and serve their neighbors in their vocations throughout the week.

WILKEN: You've drawn a striking parallel between old-line liberalism, what it was doing about 50-40 years ago, and what pop American Evangelicalism is doing today. With only about two minutes here draw some of those parallels for us, Mike.

HORTON: Sure. Well, you know, you do this all the time, Todd, and I think we would agree a lot. A lot of the emphasis on sentimentalism. You know, the idea that God's wrath is justly revealed from heaven against all ungodliness is totally foreign to us now. Consequently, we do not ... those who don't have a great problem don't need a great solution. Christ is no longer the God-Man who died for our sins and was raised for our justification, but is a wonderful advisor, encourager, example, proto-type. And in all of those ways doctrine isn't important. B. B. Warfield made a great point, the old Princeton theologian. He says, "Pietists and rationalists hunt their prey in pairs. They drag down their quarry together." He said the pietist loves God so much that he despises doctrine, and the liberal loves Him so little that he despises doctrine. But they both say, "No creed but Christ." They both say, "Not creeds but deeds." And they both despise "head knowledge over heart knowledge." And as Warfield pointed out in that essay, all this means we're finally left with Christless Christianity because, at the end of the day, it means that Christ is an experience we have in our heart, not a Person who is proclaimed to us in history through the pages of Scripture.

WILKEN: He's, what, kind of the lead among Abraham Lincoln, George Washington and other great inspirational figures of history but can't touch me here and now, and all I really need Him for is just daily inspiration, right? Only about a minute here.

HORTON: Well, yeah. Yeah, exactly. And they you finally get to the place where Brian McLaren, a leader of the emergent movement, says that his goal is not to get people to become Christians, but to get Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and others to become better Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, because finally it's really all about following Jesus' example and His moral teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. And you really think you can do that. You really think that you can, unlike the rich young ruler who walked away sad because he had

many possessions, think that you actually can surrender all and achieve this status of standing before God with clean hands and a pure heart.

WILKEN: About thirty seconds.

HORTON: Then you're welcome to it. But as for me and my house we're going to cling to that robe that He has provided in His Son that does withstand the terror of God's judgment.

WILKEN: We're talking with Dr. Mike Horton. When we come back, he says, "We are living out our creed. Pop American Evangelicalism is living out its creed. The problem is the creed is closer to the American dream than historic Christianity. You can find out more about Mike's new book called *Christless Christianity* under the "On-Demand" page of our website—www.issuesetc.org. Do you agree that much of American Christianity has become Christless in essence? Our call-in number: 1-877-623-MY-IE, 877-623-6943, or HYPERLINK "mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org" talkback@issuesetc.org.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* We're talking about "Christless Christianity," preaching the Christian rather than the Christ, no substitute really. Our guest: Dr. Mike Horton. I'm Todd Wilken. You can give us a call. 1-877-623-MY-IE or HYPERLINK "mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org" talkback@issuesetc.org. Mark is calling from his car. Mark, welcome.

CALLER: Pastor Todd, I was wondering if all of this results from, when God in His Word almost tells us of an alternate reality, that I'm a real sinner and things like that. And I'm wondering if part of the problem is that we don't accept God's reality in preference to our own, because in a lot of respects it almost seems contradictory to what we see and think and believe.

WILKEN: Mark, thank you very much. Mark's singing your tune, isn't he, Mike?

HORTON: Absolutely. Absolutely. This is the thing. If I could say one thing to my fellow pastors, the Sunday school teachers, and to parents, we have to realize that the Gospel isn't just foreign to us when we're unregenerate. It remains astonishing. It remains surprising. It remains unbelievable, apart from the Spirit. It is still something that takes a miracle to believe. We have just got to remember that and not take the Gospel for granted.

WILKEN: Ross, in Minneapolis, emails us. He says, "I have several American Evangelical friends and relatives who are very active in their churches. It's hard to even talk about Christless Christianity with them because they're so wrapped up in the newest book, Bible study, small group program. They hardly even have time to focus on theology, per se. How does this neo-monasticism," as Ross calls it, "fit into the problem of Christless Christianity?"

HORTON: Well, it underscores the point again, Todd, that there are even good things—I think a lot of these things are, by the way, not good—but there are even very good things that the church is preoccupied with and that we as Christians are preoccupied with, that we can even find Bible verses for, that are disproportionately important to us when compared to the centrality we give to Christ. We just, we really do assume that Christ is absolutely important. It is so essential that we hold down the fort on the Deity of Christ and on His work on the cross. There are still a lot of Evangelicals who hold that view. "But, okay, we believe that now. Now let's go on to the important stuff. We got saved. Now let's talk about how we can bring an end to this problem or that issue, how we can improve our lives, how we improve our world." And the problem is the next generation that sits under that kind of preaching week after week after week, not having been taught out of its native Pelagianism, just wakes up Mormon the next day. Everybody just sort of thinks we're all good people who could be better. And they don't take the Gospel for granted; they never heard it clearly.

WILKEN: It's odd you mention that. I got an instant message from a friend earlier today who was attending the Reveal Conference at Willow Creek, the one you had mentioned before, attending it as we speak, and he kind of quipped to me over the instant message, he said, "This is like being in a group of Mormons. Jesus is irrelevant here. This is all about self-improvement. The experience we that can generate for our people. Leading people toward transformed lives.

Jesus and His cross are just completely irrelevant here.”

HORTON: Right. Well, that’s what happens when transformation becomes the central category, as it has. We have a place for transformation in our systematic theology. It’s called “Sanctification.” It isn’t the same thing as transformation the way it’s being talked about today. It’s actually the work of Christ through the Gospel, but it is a category of becoming new creatures in Christ. So we talk about that under “Sanctification.” But there is no sanctification without justification. We can’t ever move on from the Gospel to talk about “our” transformation, because it’s the Gospel—which isn’t our transformation but Christ’s doing and dying—it’s that Gospel that transforms us. We’ve got to—I know it’s counter-intuitive—but we’ve got to get to the place where we’re willing to say that, as counter-intuitive as it seems, the righteousness that Israel is pursuing by works it did not obtain, and those who did not pursue righteousness by works obtained it. What did Paul mean by that? Well, in part it means: those who seek to turn the Gospel into a plan for their own self-salvaging operation don’t actually salvage themselves. And those who look to the Gospel as an external announcement of Good News, the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, ironically, have changed lives. It’s not by focusing on changed lives that we have changed lives, but focusing on Christ.

WILKEN: You have written that American Evangelicals and pop American Christianity is living out its creed, but that the creed is closer to the American dream than to the historic Christian faith. What do you mean?

HORTON: Well, Rick Warren and other Evangelical leaders have argued, “Hey, look, we have the right doctrine, we’re just not living right. We’re just, we’re not living out our faith, and that’s the problem. So we need more deeds and less creeds.” Well, in actual fact, if you look at the statistics, we are living out our faith, and our faith is in ourselves, our faith is in what we can make of ourselves, what we can make for ourselves. Our faith is in the market, or our faith is in our ability to pull off the next round of spiritual disciplines. We’re not being called outside of ourselves to look to Christ. We’re being drawn deeper and deeper and deeper into ourselves. And this was borne out, as you know, Todd, in that remarkable study by Christian Smith, sociologist from Notre Dame, who after several years of studying America’s teens concluded that the working theology of American teenagers and their parents is what he described as “moralistic, therapeutic deism.” And the degree to which that characterizes people’s faith and practice rises with their level of attendance at Evangelical churches. I said, “This is the Unitarians, right?” He said, “No, this is actually Evangelicalism as much as Unitarianism.” You’re more likely to embrace a moralistic, therapeutic, deistic view of the world and Christianity if you go to church regularly than if you stay at home.

WILKEN: Someone would say, “Well, Mike, yeah, that sounds bad, but at least it’s moralistic, therapeutic deism. At least they’re not atheists.” How would you respond, with about a minute here?

HORTON: It’s far better for them to be atheists, because at least an atheist is in a position where he or she is more likely to actually admit and concede that he or she hates God. And what we’re doing when we try to escape God’s wrath by hiding ourselves in our own fig leaves is hate God, in the guise of spirituality, in the guise of religion. And so it’s hidden, it’s under false pretenses. But it’s actually better for people to shake their fist in God’s face and say, “I don’t want you to reign over me,” and at least have some confrontation with the Law, so that then we can talk about the Gospel.

WILKEN: Dr. Mike Horton is our guest. We’re talking about “Christless Christianity.” I want to hear from you, folks. We’ve got ten more minutes on the other side of this break. Our call-in number live this Wednesday, October the 15th: 1-877-623-MY-IE, 877-623-9643, or email us right here in the studio: [HYPERLINK "mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org" talkback@issuesetc.org](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org). You know what I hear a lot—the voice of pop American Evangelicalism, this “Christless Christianity”—I hear a lot of people objecting, “Look, we don’t have time to concern ourselves with doctrine. After all, pure doctrine is a pipe dream. Yeah, it’s a great goal, but since it’s

impossible to reach, we don't have time to worry about doctrine. We need to get out and reach the lost. And, yeah, our message might be a little flawed. We might have to bend a few corners over to get it out there and repackage it and fit it into the package that we want it to fit into, but we really got to be worried about the lost and not doctrine. All in the name of mission, of course. When we come back, we'll address that issue with Dr. Mike Horton, Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California, co-host of the national radio program *The White Horse Inn*, and author of the new book, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*. He said early in our conversation that we're assuming the Gospel. We're simply assuming, "Yes, yes, Jesus, His cross, all that's very nice. Now let's get on to the real stuff." You know what they used to say in old Lutheran circles? "The Gospel assumed is the Gospel denied." We'll be right back.

[BREAK]

LEAD-IN:

Jennings: *You didn't think it was important even to have one cross?*

Hybels: *Uh, we're very serious about what Christ did on the cross, but to capture the essence of Christianity in a single symbol is a little dangerous, we feel.*

WILKEN: That's the late Peter Jennings with Pastor Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church outside of Chicago explaining why there is no cross, no not even one, at Willow Creek. Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. We're talking about "Christless Christianity." It really is "crossless Christianity" in the end. Our email address: [HYPERLINK "mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org"](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org) talkback@issuesetc.org. Our call-in number: 1-877-623-MY-IE, 877-623-6943.

Okay, let's talk a little bit about what I often hear in my circle that sounds like the voice of pop American Christianity: "We don't have time to be concerned with doctrine. We need to reach the lost." How do you respond?

HORTON: Well, you know, for denominations as rich in their confessional heritage as the LCMS to say that is kind of a shock to the system. It's one of the reasons why, you know, the United Reformed Churches to which I belong pulled out of the Christian Reformed Church a decade ago, because so quickly, you know, the Christian Reformed Church had this great heritage of confessional Christianity, catechesis. Kids got dropped out of school and went to Catechism. But it became rote, it became something that people went through the motions on, and it was strictly enforced, policed by doctrinal police, but people didn't really revel in it. It wasn't something joyfully animating for their lives. And, you know, I think that it's understandable when you have another generation say, "It's so cold. It's so formal. It did nothing for me. It was irrelevant." But wow! I want to say to folks who've been raised in confessional churches, what I say to Dutch Reformed people who've been raised in it and don't realize why all of us from Evangelicalism get excited about their own theology, is you don't realize the treasure you have until it's too late. We became ... those of us who were not raised in Reformation Christianity saw this as the lifeboat, for Pete's sake, and not something to be taken for granted. I just encourage churches that have a confessional heritage not to sit on their laurels, not to pride themselves on their heritage, but say, "This is a treasure," and if you're not getting it out there, if you're not passing it out to your own people, I doubt very seriously that you're passing it out to others. And you may basically ignore the sheep in order to get more goats in the door, but are you—what are you getting them in with. And if it's evangelism, it's got to be with the Gospel.

WILKEN: Well, I mean, in my circles it's not so much resting on your laurels as viewing, by some, viewing the rich treasure of Scriptural doctrine as in a sense a hindrance to getting the job done. It's holding them back.

HORTON: Yeah, I just don't understand how that works. So Christ's atoning death, Christ being God and Man in one Person, God's having chosen us before the foundation of the world without

basing it on what He knew we would choose or do, our being declared righteous before the throne of God simply for the sake of Christ's active and passive obedience—how on earth are these rich, wonderful, marvelous doctrines somehow inimical to the good of the Church? Again and again when Paul tells Timothy “In the last days men will be lovers of themselves” and have all kinds of practical problems, he says, “Preach the word. Be ready to teach them sound doctrine. Times are coming when people won't put up with sound doctrine.” He doesn't say, well, you know, people are going to be like that, so tone down the doctrine. He says that's when you should turn it up and make sure that this war between the spirit of the age and the Holy Spirit and the age to come, is waged with great vigor, not that we basically lay down our weapons and surrender to the whims of the passing age we're trying to convert.

WILKEN: Two final questions. You talked earlier about how the Gospel message is being simply assumed in pop American Christianity. We used to say, “The Gospel assumed is the Gospel denied.” Would you concur?

HORTON: [Laughter] That is such a great line. And it's not just a line; it is proved again and again. I received something like that from a gentleman, Reformed Anglican in England, who wrote this really moving article on the assumed Gospel in the evangelical times in England and it was astounding. I have lots of quotes from it in *Christless Christianity*. It really is, I think, a major category that we have to take seriously. We have to ask, “Are people in our churches, churches that we think are good, you know, churches that we think are faithfully preaching Christ, do the young people in our church share the general cultural assumptions that Christian Smith documented of moralistic, therapeutic deism?” Can they explain not just the experience they have, not just a vague meaningfulness of Jesus in their life? Can they explain the content of their faith? And if they can't, why do we think they're going to be able to share that with unbelievers?

WILKEN: With only a minute, is this evangelism: make a decision for Jesus and He'll help you improve your life?

HORTON: No, not at all. Evangelism, first of all, is an announcement. It comes from the herald who is sent from the battlefield by the great king to announce to everybody back home that the war is over, that there has been a conquest, a victory on the battlefield. We are sent to announce that victory of God on the battlefield, how God, the Triune God, in Jesus Christ, the Son of His love, has conquered sin and death on our behalf. And as we placard that, God will give people faith through it. We say in the Heidelberg Catechism, in answer to the question “Where does true faith come from?” the answer is: “The Holy Spirit creates it through the preaching of the Holy Gospel and confirms it through the use of the Holy Sacraments.” Paul said it better: “Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ.” And that is not just something that we file away in our systematic theology. We have to believe that the power of God lies, not in our methods, not in our techniques, not in our programs, not in our spiritual disciplines, not in our testimonies to victory, but in the announcement, the regular announcement, that God has achieved victory on the battlefield for us.

WILKEN: Folks, go to our website tonight. Find out more about Mike Horton's new book, *Christless Christianity* – issuesetc.org. Click “On-Demand.” Dr. Mike Horton is Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California, co-host of the national radio show *The White Horse Inn*, and author of the new book, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*. Mike, thanks so much for being our guest.

HORTON: Todd, as always thank you for all that you do to uphold Christ and Him crucified.

WILKEN: Tomorrow on the program, the Doctrine of the Trinity—one of those irrelevant doctrines that's been largely forgotten by American Christianity, but for the sake of argument we'll bring it back out again and see maybe whether or not even this teaching that really informs most of Holy Scripture and its interpretation can draw us closer to the cross of Jesus Christ, where we belong on a daily basis. Dr. Carl Fickenscher will be our guest.

Yes, what is Paul warning against when he says there is a time coming when men with itching ears will gather around them a great number of teachers—And is there any shortage of such teachers today? No—who will simply tell them what they want to hear. They will not stand for the sound teaching which is centered on the cross, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. But they'll talk about anything, everything else than what people really need to hear. They'll tell people what they want to hear. And people will listen to what they want to hear. But what they want is irrelevant. What they need is what Christ came to provide. What does Paul say? Paul's warning us about this very day. Many times throughout the Church it's been true, but it is very true today too. This very era where the Church has decided that it's more effective to preach the Christian than the Christ, that Jesus is a great helper and inspiration, but that bloody death, that resurrection, that might be good to get you started, but you don't need it too much after that. The Gospel that Paul says he is at pains to preach—"Woe unto me if I do not preach it;" "I was determined to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified;" "far be it from me to glory in anything other than the cross of Christ"—that's considered passé today. And that's what Paul's warning us against. What's the solution? Take up the Gospel again. Preach it to every sinner, every Sunday, at every opportunity. Pray it. Sing it. Make it the life of the Church, because that's the only life the Church has.

I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.*

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