



Issues, Etc.TM

Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio

TRANSCRIPT

Rev. Todd Wilken, Host

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"The Suburbanization of American Christianity"

Guest:

Dr. Michael Horton

Co-host: *The White Horse Inn*

**Author: *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*
Westminster Theological Seminary, Escondido, CA**

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Audio Clip – Joel Osteen: I like to get started each week with something kind of funny...

Music Clip: Let me entertain you, let me make you smile...

Audio Clip – Joel Osteen: ...I heard about this kindergarten teacher. She was walking around her classroom as her students drew pictures. She noticed this one little girl drawing so intently. She asked her what she was drawing. The little girl said she was drawing a picture of God...

Music Clip: ...and if you're real good, I'll make you feel good. I want your spirits to climb, so...

Audio Clip – Joel Osteen: ...The teacher kind of laughed. She said, "Oh, honey, nobody really knows what God looks like." The little girl, without missing a beat said, "They will in a minute." [Laughter]

Music Clip: ...and, yes, sir, we'll have a real good time...

WILKEN: Welcome to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in. We're coming to you live on this Tuesday afternoon, December 16. We're going to be talking about – Well, it's just a part of the suburbanization of Christianity, isn't it? An emphasis now on the entertaining nature of Sunday morning. Gotta start with a joke. Joel Osteen is pulling it off better than anybody ever has. He's going to be topping 50,000 soon at Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, every week. And he does it by starting with a simple, clean joke and then some helpful hints on how to be nice, and it's all very entertaining. I've actually been to Lakewood Church for a service, and the one thing I can say about that experience was, it did entertain. It's part of the suburbanization of Christianity. We'll be talking about that here for the next hour of the program with Dr. Mike Horton. Dr. Mike Horton is a regular guest—Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California, co-host of the national radio show, *The White Horse Inn*, and author of several books, including his latest titled, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*. Mike, welcome back.

HORTON: Great to be back with you, Todd.

WILKEN: Does pop-American Christianity really target white, upper middle-class, suburbanites, and the baby-boomers?

HORTON: Well, I have – yeah, I don't want to over generalize, but – I personally have not yet run across a giant, evangelical campaign that targets inner-city Detroit or Chicago, south side of Chicago, or – what? – east L.A. Everything that I see out there when it comes to the church growth movement focuses on suburban, upscale, upwardly mobile Americans. And I think that suggests that that's where a lot of aspiring, entrepreneurial pastors want to plant their stakes.

WILKEN: What's wrong with the church that tailors itself to this specific generation, race, class of people that is typified by suburbia?

HORTON: Well, you know, in the interest of reaching over to pull people up, sometimes you fall in, and I don't question the motives – I don't know the motives – of a lot of these folks. I think that to give them the benefit of the doubt, I think that they probably have a great passion to win the lost to Christ. They want to proclaim the Gospel. They want to see the Gospel transform people's lives. But I think that in the process even their idea of what the Gospel is has been transformed by the very culture that they're trying to address.

WILKEN: So what is, in a nutshell – and, of course, we have to generalize a little bit here – but what is the Gospel of a suburbanized American Christianity? What's the good news?

HORTON: Well, you know, in my latest book, *Christless Christianity*, instead of trying to make this stuff up myself, I relied on the work of others. I went to Christian Smith, for example. And he's a sociologist at Notre Dame. He concluded after five years of study – it's published by Oxford University Press – that after studying a bunch of America's teens, he concluded that the common denominator was what he called "moralistic, therapeutic deism." And he said, basically, you know, this is an upwardly mobile society. These young people aren't being persecuted for their faith. They're not troubling themselves over questions of whether Jesus really rose from the dead, or what is the actual content of the Bible and the Christian faith. They just want to have fun. And they see the Gospel as basically God is there for me when I need Him. He helps me with relationships. He gives me self-esteem. He makes me happy.

It's called moralistic, according to Smith, because most believe that – and this is

churched and unchurched alike; there's no difference statistically, he said, between those raised in evangelical churches and those who don't go to church at all – basically, I'm a nice person; I'm a good person; all good people go to heaven when they die. I just need some tips and some advice and some encouragement along the way.

It's therapeutic because God exists for me. That's why He's there after all, and I'm the apple of His eye. I'm the reason that He gets up out of bed every morning. He exists to make me happy. And so Christianity isn't proclaimed because it's public truth about something that actually happened for sinners, but it's useful. I find it useful in my life, and very meaningful to me personally.

And then finally, deistic. God is really not involved in my life except when I whistle and, sort of like the butler, He comes when the load gets too heavy. Otherwise, He's sort of out of sight, out of mind.

And, you know, when you think about that – moralistic, therapeutic deism – really it sounds like Santa Claus. It sounds a lot like he knows when you are sleeping, he knows when you're awake, he knows when you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness' sake. The rest of the year He's pretty much out of the picture, but come Christmas and He decides, "Ah, well, they're pretty good," and passes out gifts. Very different from the God of the Bible.

WILKEN: The American dream has varied in our long history, but it's current manifestation has a lot to do with, oh, I guess you could summarize it by saying, individual, perhaps radically independent individuals, working hard, playing by the rules, and reaping the rewards of their labor, and that is success, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and a profound sense of contentment all culminating with a very comfortable retirement – the American dream. Is this the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

HORTON: No, it's what the Gospel saves us from. You know, this is the thing. I love the line from C. S. Lewis, where he says we're like children making mud pies in the slums because we can't even conceive of what it would be like to have a holiday at the sea. We're settling for trivialities. That's the thing. If my kids got what they wanted, they wouldn't really be happy. They'd be sick, because they would eat so much candy, they would get tired of it and writhe in pain. They would be lethargic. They wouldn't want to run around. Hell is actually the place where everybody gets what they want forever. And heaven is God knowing better what really gives us lasting fulfillment and joy, namely, to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. And there's nothing greater than the enjoyment of God, but I think that in our sinful, fallen condition, even as Christians, that just doesn't grab us, and we don't realize that the things we think we're going to find the greatest joy in are really trivialities. And if we don't see our lives as something more than the American dream, then we'll never really come to grips with the fact that we're dead in sin, under the wrath of God, and that God has found a way to reconcile us to Himself in His Son.

WILKEN: We're talking about the suburbanization of American Christianity. Dr. Mike Horton is our guest—Professor of systematic theology and apologetics Westminster Seminary in Escondido, CA, co-host of the national radio show, *The White Horse Inn*, and he's author of several books, including his latest titled *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*. Now I want to hear from you on the suburbanization of American Christianity. We're not just talking about the relocation of pop-American Christianity to the suburbs; we're talking about the profound influence that the suburban mindset has had on pop-American Christianity. When we come back, we're going to talk about consumer sovereignty. Stay tuned.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* Talking about the suburbanization of American Christianity. Dr. Mike Horton is our guest.

Andy's listening in St. Louis. Andy, thanks for waiting.

CALLER: Hi, Todd. I think at this point maybe it would be a good idea to discuss the difference between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross, because even those of us who know the theology of the cross and understand it find ourselves getting caught up in the theology of glory, because that's the center focus of what passes for Christianity in America.

WILKEN: Andy, thank you very much. Mike?

HORTON: Wow! Could not agree more. And I think that where that happens often for us, Todd, in our churches is at the level of methods. We can get up and do a pretty good talk when it comes to the content of the Gospel being Christ's doing and dying for us, and we can preach the Gospel. If someone asks us to preach the Gospel, we can press the "preach the Gospel button" and do okay. I think the tougher part of that is to connect the rest of what Paul says, for instance, in Romans 3 through 9 to what he says in Romans 10, namely, that the message is inseparable from the method. And the message of the Gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing. It comes off as powerless. There's no power in that, according to the Gentile mind. And not only the message, though, the methods seem foolish and powerless in the eyes of the world. How on earth could preaching – you know, some guy getting up front and proclaiming something from this ancient text and splashing water on a kid and handing wine and bread to people – how can this get press attention? This is not spectacular. We've got to find more relevant and exciting

means of attracting people. It's at that point, I think, Todd, where we really find the theology of the cross inadequate for our contemporary needs and ministry. And we crave, both as pastors and parishioners, we crave a theology of glory.

WILKEN: Steve in listening in St. Louis. Hi, Steve.

CALLER: Hi. How are you doing?

WILKEN: Very well.

CALLER: Great. I hope you're enjoying the sunny weather in California, Mike.

HORTON: Well, you know it's not very sunny today, actually. It's colder than a well digger's stick.

CALLER: Yeah, yeah. As opposed to snow and ten degrees. Anyway,

HORTON: Yeah, I guess it's all relative.

CALLER: It's all relative. Anyway, hey, a couple of things on suburbanization. One of the things, if you've noticed, is that when people move from the urban to the suburban, they tend to congregate together with people who are just like them – economics, social, etc. You look at the churches today, and a lot of the churches are being pushed based on some social, economic demographic, and how often do you see people worshiping with parents and grandparents and where you see the whole litany of all the ages.

WILKEN: Thank you very much, Steve. Mike?

HORTON: This is a huge issue for me right now that I'm really giving a lot of thought and concern to. I think it's one of the – it ranks right up there with any heresy that is threatening the Church today, and that is splitting the Body of Christ apart on the basis of worldly demographics instead of

the one demographic that matters, namely, in Christ. That is our location: in Christ. You're either in Adam or in Christ. And, you know, the way Christ forms a community around Himself is through preaching and sacraments. If I become the focus and I come up with methods, I'm going to come up with a church that looks like me, that feels like me, that sounds like me. And it's not surprising that that is actually what we are increasingly finding out there, where now it's not the blood of Christ that draws us together, but it's whether we're "boomers" or "busters" or "X-ers" or "Y-ers," whether we are black or white, whether we're suburban or urban, whether we like Wal-Mart or Restoration Hardware, Starbucks or Maxwell House. It's all based on market demographics. And when we hear even church leaders say, "This is not your father's church," they're just echoing, they're just repeating an Oldsmobile commercial that says, "This is not your father's Oldsmobile." We're echoing our culture. And the problem is, that's not missional. That's not evangelistic. It is a corrupt view of how God passes His saving grace on from generation to generation. "I will be a God to you and to your children after you." That directly flies in the face of an assertion that we can be divided up according to market demographics.

WILKEN: In that vein, it seems to me that one of the driving principles of a suburbanized pop-American Christianity is consumer sovereignty. Some will blatantly assert this, like George Barna, where he'll essentially say – he won't use the word "consumer," but he will say the "audience" is sovereign. You let the audience shape the message. Nothing else is sovereign. And others won't say it, but they certainly practice it. And what the consumer always wants is self-fulfillment – whether it's his purpose or a better life. He demands it. Talk about consumer sovereignty.

HORTON: Yeah. This is nothing new. Think of what Paul tells Timothy—Timothy, a young minister, easily swayed, under a lot of pressure, especially with all of the super-apostles running around, the first century equivalent of Joel Osteen. And what does Paul say? He says, "Look, I know what the statistics are going to say. I know the polls. In the last days men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, etc. I don't need a poll to tell me that. I know that," says Paul. "As for you, Timothy, keep your head down. Do the work of an evangelist. Preach the Word, when it's popular, when it's not. And have confidence in that Word to change people's lives." That, I think, is very different from a consumer mentality. You're right. If I am left to myself and I get what I want, then that list that Paul mentions there is the kind of church that I'm going to join, the kind of church I'm going to want to be a part of. But the church that I want for myself is not the church that I need, and the church that ultimately, if I were really holy, I would want. But God knows best. He knows how to save me from myself and my felt needs.

WILKEN: So, it used to be sinners – the church has gone out to save sinners. Then it became to attract seekers. If the end of the sentence is consumers, what's the verb there? You go from save sinners to attract seekers to *what* consumers?

HORTON: Satisfy. I mean isn't that what you have to do with consumers. You want them to come back. You have to satisfy them. And the problem is, you can never make good on all of those promises. It's a form, in my view, of taking the Lord's name in vain, to make promises to people in the name of God, in the name of Christ, that He never made, while ignoring all of the promises that He has made to us in His Son. That, it seems to me, is the greatest breach of occupational integrity that we see in a lot of pastors across America today.

WILKEN: Okay, then, with only about thirty seconds here, it seems as though if satisfaction is – I mean satisfaction at the consumer level, if I’m just a retailer, has a lot to do with just satisfying people’s expectations and feelings. We want them to feel good about the product, feel good about themselves when they buy it, when they possess it, and when they bring it home. What [is] the role of emotions in suburbanized pop-American Christianity? About thirty seconds to begin a response before the break.

HORTON: Okay. Well, it’s about our narcissism. Everything is an experience today. We go to Epcot Center for the China experience without ever having to go to China. You know, you can have an Oxford – Oxford University – they have the Oxford experience where you can go on a cheesy ride. And now we have worship experiences where everything is packaged and sold to us. And the thing is a worship experience isn’t about God; it’s about me. It shifts the focus from the object of our faith to the subject of faith.

WILKEN: We’ll talk more about that on the other side of the break. Dr. Mike Horton is our guest, discussing the suburbanization of American Christianity. When we come back, the role of the emotion. The seat of the self is now my feelings. Worship and the whole Christian experience has to be, according suburbanized Christianity, all about what’s going on inside me. If it’s not going on inside me, it’s not relevant to me. It doesn’t matter, and I’m not gettin’ anything out of it. How often have we heard that? Is the role of the Church to satisfy the emotional needs or the other felt needs of the consumer? Maybe we could take it back a couple steps from consumer, past seeker, back to sinners. Sinners’ problems aren’t emotional; they’re more objective than that. Dr. Mike Horton is our guest. Stay tuned.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* Dr. Mike Horton is our guest. I’m Todd Wilken. Talking about the suburbanization of Christianity—in many ways kind of the “me-centered” generation finds its voice in suburbanized Christianity, especially in American Christianity.

Mike, let’s talk a little bit more about the role of—The new seat of self for American Christians is the emotions, and it has to be about what’s happening in *me*, at my emotional center, or it isn’t worship, it isn’t relevant. It may not even be real if it isn’t somehow emotionally impacting me. How did we get to this point?

HORTON: Yeah. Boy, that’s a tough one. Rene Descartes, the so-called founder of modern philosophy, located the seat of all authority in the self by way of reason. Our inner reason is sort of the sovereign arbiter of truth. And then, after Romanticism, it was the sovereign emotions, sovereign feelings. In both ways, very different ways—one through the head, the other through the heart—it’s inner, it’s inside of us, either in my mind or in my heart. Don’t trust anything outside of you; only trust what you know deep down inside, either in your mind or in your conscience or in your heart. And today it’s in your heart. You know, people really do think that that’s where religion belongs. Religion is not about public claims that are either true or false. They’re about therapeutic claims that are either helpful or unhelpful. And part of that therapy, that role of helpfulness that religion has, is to give me intense emotional experiences.

Joe Queenan, writer for GQ magazine, has written, eloquently and with a lot of wit, about the boomer generation, and he says, You know, ours is the only generation—and here you’re really talking about suburbia—ours is the only generation that no longer can just take your son to a ball game. It’s like a Bar’ Mitzvah or First Communion now. Everything has to be an ecstatic,

mountaintop experience. You can't just have a nice dinner with friends. It has to be the most exquisite meal you've ever had. Everything now has to be over the top. And he says—he's not a Christian—he says, It's just pure narcissism. It is nothing but smelling our own feet, stewing in our own juices, demanding constant catering, constant pampering. And what it does is, it doesn't cause us to look outside of ourselves for anything. We live in a very narrow cocoon of our own making, a cocoon not just of our making, but of Madison Avenue's making and Disney's making and Hollywood's making. We live in this cocoon where we think we're free, we think that we're happy, we think that we have the good life. And yet we're miserable, because life isn't giving us this mountaintop experience every second. We're mad at people for not delivering on what human beings are incapable of delivering.

We really are like the people of Israel described in Isaiah 59, when God brings them into the courtroom and shows them their sins, and they say, Ah, this is why we growl like bears and moan like doves. We look for light, but there's only darkness. We're like bears—we're just growling and grumpy. And I think that's where we are in our culture. And the only thing that can solve that is not by catering to it more, but by going into these suburbs and into the cities and wherever else this narcissism reigns, which is in all of our hearts, and tell it like it is. Declare the Law in all of its ferocious honesty, and the Gospel in all of its beautiful clarity and richness and grace, and let the Holy Spirit do the work. That's where the real power is.

WILKEN: The emotional experience that is being offered by way of catering to the suburbanite and baby-boom mindset by pop-American Christianity is also a very narrow experience. It's a very particular, specific experience, and others besides me—so I feel a little safe venturing out onto

this limb—others besides me have tried to make a comparison to categorize the experience, in particular the worship experience of pop-American Christianity, and the best parallel they've come up with, and I happen to agree, is a sexual experience.

HORTON: Yeah. Well, that's what Joe Queenan uses as his analogy. I wasn't going to go there, but yeah. No, exactly, exactly. Exactly. And the thing is, you know, think of the things that have had the biggest impact on your life. Think of the things that have – you know, I will never forget the day when the doctor – we didn't know whether one of our triplets would be dead when he was delivered. I'll never forget. I remember the exact emotions I felt, everything that was going through my mind, when the doctor reached in and he announced in the operating room, "He's fine." Just my whole world changed. I'll never forget the day when the minister pronounced to Lisa and me, "I now pronounce you husband and wife." If I only had my own inner life and inner experiences, I'd be a poor man. I'm rich because of, I'm richest because of, the things that have happened to me, the things that happened externally, that I was a recipient of.

We don't even realize that it's the hedonist's paradox. The more a hedonist tries to make himself happy by partying every night and so forth, the less happy he gets. They call that the hedonist's paradox. The more emotion you try to go after when you make emotion the object of your love and desire, the less genuine rapture you'll have. But then when you're actually confronted by a God outside of you who's holy, you experience terror. And when you're really confronted by the same God stooping down to you in your own form as one of you, as your elder Brother, hanging on a cross, dying for your sins, being raised for your justification, and that is announced to you, "I now pronounce you justified," there is no

emotion on earth that compares to that. There is no experience greater than knowing you have peace with God even when you don't feel it.

WILKEN: This email comes from Matt in Seward, Nebraska, and brings us to another subject on the suburbanization of Christianity. Matt writes, "My observation is that people often want to be served everything at church that they should get from other venues—gourmet coffee, cool videos, financial counseling, children's entertainment, just to name a few. At the same time they don't want to receive the gifts which God desires to give them through the Church—Gospel preaching, Baptism, the Lord's Body and Blood." With only a minute here before we take a break and time to continue on the other side, your response, Mike.

HORTON: Yeah. Just as the Gospel has become defined as just about anything and everything that makes you happy, ministry has become defined as just about anything and everything that promises to deliver it. Both need to be more sharply defined today.

WILKEN: Dr. Mike Horton is our guest, Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California, co-host of the national radio show, *The White Horse Inn*, author of several books, including his latest, titled *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*. When we come back, we're going to talk a little bit more about the "mall" – it's a verb now – the "mall" of American Christianity. One-stop shopping. In fact, that kind of becomes a *sine qua non* of a really good, growing church. You've got to have coffee, got to have a bookstore, got to have it all. We'll be right back.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* We're talking about the suburbanization of American Christianity. Dr. Mike Horton is our guest. I'm Todd Wilken.

Mike, we had an opportunity in the last couple of years to visit two of the biggest, most influential mega-churches in the United States sometime back. Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. We were there on an off day because there was virtually no one else but me and Jeff wandering about their rather expansive campus. It looked to me like a community college, but it had all the hallmarks of a mall—coffee shop, place to eat, very big bookstore. It was kind of one-stop shopping. The same thing was true when we visited Lakewood in Houston, Texas, Joel Osteen's—it's hard to call it even a mega-church; I don't what's bigger than "mega," but it's big—and it had the same kind of flavor to it: a typical, all-inclusive venue. What's wrong with the church looking and acting like a shopping mall?

HORTON: Well, you know, I think it says a lot about your church if it looks like a theater or if it looks like a mall. You're basically giving people an impression. And if you add to that the message being all about you and how you can be happier and the elimination of anything that might suggest that God is actually doing something there, namely the Sacraments, and the new sacrament is the preacher himself behind his plexi-glass pulpit and all eyes, cameras, and lights on him, then it makes perfect sense that they're selling something. That's what all of that says. Here's a product. We're selling it. We want you to buy it. If you buy it, you'll have a great experience that will be life transforming. Where's Christ?

I just got a brochure in the mail from the symphony that said, "Come back to the symphony this season for transformative experiences." They didn't tell me anywhere

in the brochure whether they were doing Vivaldi or Chopin or Mozart. I don't know what they're doing. It's not about the music anymore; it's about a musical experience. Well, the same thing is happening in the church. We're trying to get customers who aren't interested in what we believe or why we believe it, and so instead of proclaiming what we believe and why we believe it, and having our ministry revolve around evangelism, reaching out to people, Christians and non-Christians alike who need to hear the Gospel, we are turning it into something that we think will be more successful.

WILKEN: Frank's listening in Indianapolis. Frank, thanks for waiting. Welcome.

CALLER: Hello, gentlemen. You know, just had a gathering for Thanksgiving with our family. And when I talk about the Law and the Gospel, confession, Sacraments, Absolution, redemptive history, the order of salvation, you get these people [with] blank stares, and they say, "Oh, you know, Frank's an intellectual. He knows so much." It just seems like, to me, that sometimes it's just impossible to get any kind of any of these points across to people.

WILKEN: Frank, thank you very much. Mike, your response, with about a minute here?

HORTON: Yeah. It's tragic. Frank is right. He is an intellectual to a lot of Christians today who just really don't have much time for those things. And in a lot of cases it's not their fault. They go to church regularly, but in a lot of cases pastors don't give their parishioners the credit of being able to think about these things. And I think there's sometimes a greater hunger among the sheep than there is among the shepherds. That hopefully will change, because when people like Frank get a taste of seeing Christ in all the Scriptures and the distinction between Law and Gospel and the wonder of being fed, not self-feeders but

being fed, by Christ through Word and Sacrament, it changes everything, and it's not an intellectual head-trip. It's about being cared for by Christ.

WILKEN: Ann's listening in St. Louis. Hi, Ann.

CALLER: Hi, good afternoon. This past year I had an opportunity with some friends and my husband to visit the Crystal Cathedral, and what I remember about it more than anything was the ladies restroom. It was the most lavish, over the top thing I've ever seen. And coming out of there I had the notion that the message there must be prosperity. And I felt very sorry for the people that go to church there, and it's not a big church, but that restroom—you would have thought it was the Ritz.

WILKEN: Ann, thank you very much. What does that say to you, Mike? A brief response.

HORTON: Well, you know, a lot of places I could go with that, but I'm trying to...

WILKEN: ...restrain yourself, yes.

HORTON: I am trying to restrain myself. Family show. I think that, you know, as far as prosperity gospel, Robert Schuller, follower of Norman Vincent Peale—the two of them were really profoundly influenced by the "new thought movement" in the early part of the 20th century, sort of the *Think and Grow Rich* best seller in, I believe it was, the 1930s. And that movement of new thought, which we also know as Christian Science as a formal institution, is really what binds together people like Robert Schuller and Joel Osteen. They seem miles apart and yet they are very similar, and that's because they get their theology from an indigenous American movement known as "new thought."

WILKEN: This email comes from, let's see, Don in Junction City, Kansas. A very brief response, because I have one more question for you before we wrap up. Don says, "To understand pop-Christianity, just follow the money. They will take Christ out of Christianity, because that will bring in the money. They take Christ out step by step. Soon Christ is gone. This will appeal to sinful humans. They will bless your sins and make you feel good. People like it that way and send them money. They make it into a good works system. Send Joel your money, and God will bless you." Your thoughts, with only a minute?

HORTON: Yes. Paul spoke of the super apostles in exactly the same vein. They'll tell you whatever you want to hear, and they'll do it for gain. They think that godliness is a means of gain, Paul says. That is, I think, a real serious crisis in our day. It used to be, you know, materialism—you could be materialistic, but you didn't really talk about it. But today you hear preachers encouraging people to, not just make a lot of money, but to spend a lot of money and encouragement to really an extravagant kind of life, as if God promised this. And you hear this not only in prosperity, Pentecostal churches, but, for instance, Charles Stanley, a Southern Baptist pastor. You hear this in a lot of places today, and I think the caller's not being overly cynical. This is America, after all, and if it sells, then it must be true.

WILKEN: With only thirty seconds, has pop-American Christianity kind of jumped the shark in its suburbanization, trying so hard to not be offensive to the suburbanite, baby-boomer mentality that it really has no place to go. It can't be parodied. It can't be satired anymore. If you can think of it, they're doing it—sex series, pastors in bed, driving motorcycles off the edge of their stages. It's all not only been done; they're doing it all. Thirty seconds for a response.

HORTON: Yeah. You do wonder. I have stuff sent to me all the time from friends and fellow pastors, and I cease to be surprised, I'm sorry to say. I wish that I weren't so jaded. But it seems like every time there is a parody, the reality is even worse than the parody. So, again, I think the only way we can turn back this night is to stop being silly and return to God's Word, where He is the One who redeems us and rules us by His Word and Spirit, and we don't get to call the shots.

WILKEN: Dr. Mike Horton is Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California, co-host of the national radio show, *The White Horse Inn*, author of several books, including his latest, *Christ-less Christianity*. You really need to get this new book by Mike—*Christ-less Christianity*. Mike, thanks for being our guest.

HORTON: Thank you, Todd, as always.

WILKEN: When you cannot satirize or parody something, you know that it's reached a point of perhaps no return. And would you want it back if it did come back? Why all the silliness? Well, you know, that's what the consumer demands. In the end, if it is about satisfying emotional needs, appealing to the narcissist, satisfying the consumer, and if that's all it's about, you will not be giving them Christ and Him crucified. You'll just be giving them what they want. That's not what the Church is here for. I'm Todd Wilken. Talk with you again tomorrow. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.*

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