

The Burned-Over District: The Sectarians Who Shaped the American Church



FEATURING: [Bob Hiller](#), [Justin Holcomb](#), [Michael Horton](#), [Walter Strickland](#)

RELEASE DATE: [November 16, 2025](#)

SERIES: [Reformers vs Radicals](#)

TOPIC(S): [Church History](#), [Christian Biography](#), [History Of Christianity](#)

DOWNLOAD: [Episode Audio \(mp3\)](#)

What do Charles Finney, Ellen G. White, and Joseph Smith have in common? They come from the “Burned-Over District.” From revival tents to utopian communes, Michael Horton, Justin Holcomb, Walter Strickland, and Bob Hiller explore how 19th-century upstate New York became ground zero for America’s religious experiments.

▼ Transcript

Michael Horton:

If you compare Immanuel Kant, as we've talked about in another episode, Immanuel Kant and Charles Finney, they both believed that, as Kant put it, "ought implies can." If God commands something, it must be possible. So, you can live a perfect life. You can surrender to the moral intuitions in such a way that, as Kant himself put it, not the pleading of the blood of Christ but your own repentance and conversion experience suffices now, in place of hell. Now, you get out by the sincerity of your repentance. That is very much Charles Finney's view.

Hello, and welcome to another episode of White Horse Inn. You know, Charles Grandison Finney was born in 1805 and lived a very long life well into the 19th century, having a profound impact on the shaping of American Protestantism.

What's ironic is, as George Marsden and other historians have pointed out, Finney really created the type of American revivalism that shaped both the liberal wing of Protestantism and the fundamentalist wing as well. We're going to be taking a look at his impact. It was part of a nest—I kind of joke sometimes, it's called the Finney Farm—a nest of influences that had a profound effect on American culture. The rising millennialism, the expectation that the saints were going to get their act together and finally resolve all the social issues of the day, and they would Christianize not only America but the rest of the world through America. So you really get this kind of, on one hand, social gospel, Christian nationalism, and on the other hand, a kind of premillennial reaction against that, but still with a revivalist impulse. Billy Graham even called Charles Finney the greatest evangelist since the Apostle Paul.

A lot of people in American evangelical circles think of Finney in terms of his success as an evangelist. Now, many people haven't read his systematic theology, which Charles Hodge said should be called systematic ethics. He denied original sin. It's impossible for the sins of one person to be imputed to the whole of humanity, and likewise, it's impossible for the righteousness of one man, Christ, to be imputed to other people. That's in direct conflict, of course, with Romans 5 and other passages. But then he also denied the substitutionary

atonement, for the same reason; he was trained as a lawyer. He said, my only difference now is that I have a retainer from the Lord.

So now I'm going to preach the gospel. And the gospel for him was not "Christ died for sinners." He says, you can't have one person bearing the sins of another person; that's illegal. Rather, Christ died to show us how serious God was about sin and how much He loves us, so that we will repent, and that repentance is the basis for God's acceptance of us. Charles Finney's theology was essentially Pelagian in historical terms, and yet he became known as one of the most important and popular evangelists to both liberals and fundamentalists. It's really remarkable to see the impact that he had, and we're going to talk about some of those.

You know, we eat Kellogg's and graham crackers and so forth, and you see the influence—the dietary cults that emerged in the 19th century as well. A lot of it emerges out of this area of upstate New York that has been called the Burned-Over District, because that's where Finney's crusades were. People got burned out. As Finney himself said, you have to have a revival all the time because people need to be reconverted, and to do that, you're always going to need new measures, new, as he called them, inducements to repentance. So, the emotional pitch got higher and higher and higher, and eventually, people got exhausted. What grew out of that Burned-Over District was Christian Science, various other mind science cults, the early New Age movement, and a lot of health crazes.

And we're going to talk about all of those things in this episode of White Horse Inn with my good friends Bob Hiller, Walter Strickland, and Justin Holcomb. I'm Mike Horton.

Bob Hiller:

Did you say Finney was responsible for graham crackers? Because in that case, like, s'mores go back to Finney. Great.

Michael Horton:

You know, he did some good things. No, it's really this perfectionist impulse. On the one hand, it's interesting, isn't it, that part of his Christianization program, his postmillennial optimism about the church as a community of social reformers, included, on the one hand, prohibitionism and, on the other, abolition.

Bob Hiller:

Yeah.

Michael Horton:

So, you can see how some of his perfectionism went in the direction of what would be sort of more fundamentalist aims in the early 20th century, but others went more toward the liberal or social gospel wing. He's really a remarkable figure of history in that regard.

Justin Holcomb:

It makes me wonder what's happening socially that would lead that area to absorb those two opposite ways of thinking, and that his teaching, ministry, and activities could be going both directions. That area—western New York—is right at the crossroads of the Erie Canal. So at that time, you have money coming in, migrants coming in, a lot of mobility, few established pastors or clergy. So, you have this traveling revivalist kind of thing being common. It just sounds like the social churn of genuine interest, spiritual fads, cheap land, rapid town-making, rewarding entrepreneurial spirit. So here he shows up, and it's like, “Here we go! I got some euphoria and some whiplash.” It just has this churn. When I think about what was happening historically in that area, “churn” feels like the right simple word.

Michael Horton:

Yeah. And you think that upstate New York at this time was the West—it was the frontier.

Bob Hiller:

It's a Wild West.

Walter Strickland:

Yeah, it was. Well, it was really the context of the Second Great Awakening. That's the prime land for that. If we think about the First Great Awakening, we think about people like Edwards and those who were more Reformed—Whitfield and Congregationalists and things like that. But if we look to the Second Great Awakening, there's a decisive theological shift away from the sovereignty of God and the hand of God bringing and drawing sinners to salvation through Christ. So that's another factor in all this, especially as we're moving into places where there aren't trained clergy and things of that sort.

Bob Hiller:

Well, there's a sort of combination of two things in Finney: One is the revivalism from the

First Great Awakening, which, I think—and you guys can correct me—I think was mostly Calvinistic in its emphasis, though Whitfield, I’ve read, was Calvinist in his theology and Methodist in his methodology. He didn’t mind performing, and I think Benjamin Franklin was a big fan of the performances that Whitfield gave.

But you also have this heavy influence of John Wesley coming over in this Arminian view; which I don’t think Finney was Arminian, I think he was Pelagian. But I think you have Wesley coming over and impacting a sort of holiness pursuit—a way to live a holier life—and all of that kind of comes together in Perfectionism.

So, the plain account of Christian perfectionism—and Finney becomes kind of both of these things on steroids. Where perfectionism for Wesley is at some point, he finally says, “It’s just everything is done from a perfect heart of love.” Whereas for Finney, it’s like, “No, it is full-bore perfection.”

Michael Horton:

Yeah. In fact, it’s interesting if you compare Immanuel Kant—we’ve talked about in another episode—Immanuel Kant and Charles Finney. They both believed that, as Kant put it, “ought implies can.” If God commands something, it must be possible. So, you can live a perfect life. You can surrender to the moral intuitions in such a way that, as Kant himself put it, not the pleading of the blood of Christ, but your own repentance, your own conversion experience suffices now, in place of hell. Now you get out by the sincerity of your repentance. That is very much Charles Finney’s view of things.

Bob Hiller:

He’s got a sermon called “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts.” So, I mean, this is like—

Justin Holcomb:

That sounds like a Babylon Bee! Give us that title again.

Bob Hiller:

“Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts.”

Michael Horton:

Yeah.

Walter Strickland:

Which is a far cry from “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” you know.

Michael Horton:

He said the Westminster Confession of Faith is not only a paper pope, but has ruined more souls than all the atheism in the world. He said its treatment of justification—its view of justification—is pure antinomianism. Otherwise, I don’t know what antinomianism is. And he was right—he didn’t know what antinomianism was.

Bob Hiller:

So, if we want to use Reformation categories (and he might use these categories), he would say there’s such a thing as immediate sanctification and progressive justification—which is just to get everything completely backwards. So then you say, “Well, what about sin in the Christian life? Because I thought I was saved, but I keep struggling with sin.” He says, “Then you’re not a Christian.”

And this is what he says about Romans, because we would say, “Well, look at Romans 7. Paul’s describing the Christian life,” and this is what he says on Romans 7: “I am fully convinced that interpreting verses 14 through 24 as a Christian experience has done incalculable evil and has led thousands of souls there to rest and go no further, imagining they are already as deeply versed in Christian experience as Paul was when he wrote that epistle. And there they have stayed and hugged their delusion until they have found themselves in the depths of hell.”

He’s dramatic, he’s great.

Michael Horton:

That’s exactly what Pelagius told Augustine.

Bob Hiller:

It’s just amazing.

Walter Strickland:

So there's definitely this streak of the performative within Finney.

Bob Hiller:

Yes. Even in the writing.

Walter Strickland:

Oh yeah. And there seems to be a streak of desire for that sort of performative something to do toward our sanctification or justification. And it's even—you mentioned the Finney Farm, Mike—it's even prevalent in the other religious expressions emerging from this Burned-Over District at that time. There's a whole bunch of them we can talk about.

Michael Horton:

But before we get to those, can I say one more thing about Finney?

Walter Strickland:

Oh, for sure. I hope to come back to Finney, because there's so much more to say.

Justin Holcomb:

I was thinking—I'm with you, Walter. I'm thinking it kind of gives a context to Finney. Finney is famous, but there are so many other faddish things happening that, to me, sets the social context of going, "Okay, what in the world is going on? Is Finney's teaching just Finney's version of the snake oil stuff that is being sold spiritually around at that time like everyone else?"

Walter Strickland:

So the religious imagination in the Burned-Over District was requiring certain things, and Finney stepped right into it and said, "I'm going to top them all," is what I was kind of getting at. But, Mike, you can go ahead and come back to Finney after we give him some more context.

Michael Horton:

It's not just that Charles Finney was a Pelagian and denied the doctrines not only of the Reformation but of the Catholic faith, but also, his methodology flowed out of that. So there are a lot of people today who would say, "Oh no, no, no, I affirm original sin and substitutionary atonement." But their methodology might follow in Finney's wake. You have to realize that the methodology flowed out of the theology. He said a revival, like the new

birth itself, is not—I'm quoting him—"not a miracle or dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is simply the philosophical result of the right use of means." In other words, his new measures would induce repentance, which saved. That's the way he looked at it.

Now, if you're going to take that approach, again, everything falls on your ability as a communicator to whip up your own emotion so that that emotion is felt in the congregation. Remember, we talked about Schleiermacher and the shift from the object preached to the subject—the audience. That's exactly what happened; it was now about the audience. B. B. Warfield tells the story of Charles Finney walking into a factory where all the girls swooned—they fainted. It was like the Beatles coming in, you know, and they swooned. And I love Warfield's response. He says, "Alas, the evangelist has become the sacrament."

Justin Holcomb:

What a great line.

Bob Hiller:

Well, listen, so I have—this is fascinating to me. First: God doesn't convert you; you're bound to change your own heart. But don't worry, Finney's here and he can help, right? We're not going to trust God—

Justin Holcomb:

There's no miracle, it's a technique—no miracles, just techniques.

Walter Strickland:

"In Finney we trust."

Bob Hiller:

And if you don't think this stuff still exists—

The music director at my church was telling me a story that he went to a conference where they were teaching worship music and all this. The person leading the conference stood up and said, "Now, this is the chord you want to play when you want to bring about the Holy Spirit."

Michael Horton:

No!

Bob Hiller:

Yeah. I mean, you're just sitting there like, "Well, that's... not hiding it, I guess.

Michael Horton:

I can't do the whistle, but it's like, "Hey, get down here. I've got a G minor here."

Bob Hiller:

Amazing.

Michael Horton:

Wow.

Justin Holcomb:

I want to go back to something because, Mike, you said something—the new measures—that's actually the phrase he used: "new measures." You weren't summarizing; that's the phrase he used. He said, "Here are the new measures: the anxious bench, the protracted meetings, the public pressure." And he basically said revivals are like farming. You use certain techniques, and you get crops after you plow and sow the seeds. You do these things, and this is what happens. It was a cause-effect: do this, make this happen.

Michael Horton:

It was perfect for the industrial age—the factory. If you can make one guitar by handcraft, you can basically make that a prototype and figure out how to put it on an assembly line and put those out. That's how he thought about revival and miracles: there are no miracles in this, it's just the philosophical result of the right use of techniques.

And that was perfect for the industrial age. It wasn't so perfect for Christianity. He even admitted at the end of his life, looking back at things, especially looking back over the Burned-Over District, he said, "Perhaps it exhausted people. People can't rise to those emotional highs constantly."

It's like a drug—it keeps going higher. And that's what we see to this day in America: What's the next best big thing? What's the latest, greatest fad? It's that kind of—gotta ratchet up the emotions.

And where is the Holy Spirit now? Well, the Holy Spirit is where he's always been: through the preached Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, the communion of saints. He's there in

prayer as we talk to God, as He talks to us in Scripture. The Holy Spirit is where He wants to be—with Christ in the gospel.

Justin Holcomb:

This reminds me of the Lutheran pietism when Bob was talking about, “Well, this is where Luther was.” This is why it was driving him absolutely insane—the mysticism. And it’s the same thing here; he’s talking about the Burned-Over District because— Well, yeah, the anxious bench made people anxious and exhausted them. There’s no comfort, no rest for the heavy laden. If you’re a sinner, you’re good—he likes chief of sinners. He sent Christ to save them. Cast all your cares on him because He cares for you: the peace that passes all understanding. I mean, it’s the opposite of Christianity.

Walter Strickland:

So, my grandfather, part of his salvation story—which is really what repelled him from salvation in Christ—was the anxious bench. I think I told the story before on White Horse Inn, but he went to the front to sit on this bench and the preacher was giving the appeal. Then, when that appeal was given, they would receive the Holy Spirit, speak in tongues as confirmation of salvation. And he said, “I never spoke in tongues. I sat there and sat there and sat there. The reason why I did,” he says, “I wanted God so bad, but He didn’t want me.”

Bob Hiller:

Yeah.

Michael Horton:

Oh my goodness.

Walter Strickland:

So he walked out of the church doors and left for 60 years.

Michael Horton:

Oh my goodness.

Justin Holcomb:

When I was in my teens—you know, I’m here in Central Florida, but I lived in Southwest Florida and Benny Hinn was in Orlando, and I was the youth leader for one of my churches at like eighteen or something. I took a bunch of people; maybe I was older. No, I was seventeen. We all went to Benny Hinn, and it was the whole double anointing business back then. He

said, “Who wants the double anointing?” And I ran up, and I thought, “Why are there only like a hundred—there’s like a thousand of us here. Why only the small group that wants the double anointing?”

Anyway, I was up there, you know, I was ready—TBN had their cameras on everything, and I mean, same thing.

When you said it, I started crying. I remember that feeling, thinking, “Okay, I can’t—I think I want this enough. I’m doing all my adverbs, right?” Then he takes off his jacket, swings it, and everyone falls down. I turn around, and there’s no one—I’m the only one standing with my hands up, waiting. I look to my left and right and everyone else is down. I look up to him because he’s just kind of looking at me like I didn’t get the memo that I was supposed to fall. I thought it was going to happen. I remember, hands up, looked at him and just out of disgust and embarrassment at the same time, just kind of was like, “Ugh.” Then I just walked over people, went to the van, said, “Hey, I need someone else to drive.” I was just too tired. I told them, “I’m tired, I gotta sleep.”

I had to process my entire theology right there, because I thought, “Okay, either God passed over me because I have sin in my life. I’m done. I can’t look for any more sin, like, I’ve been looking. I mean, really.” I thought, “Either this is—this has to be wrong because this is not livable, or something else is right, and I’m going to go figure out what this is.” And that is—the damage that type of heresy has done to, you know, your grandfather. There are people who walk away because God’s passing over; and it doesn’t just make you anxious, it makes you fearful. The condemnation—that’s the word.

Bob Hiller:

That’s it.

Michael Horton:

How about this? This is Charles Finney in his critique of the Westminster Confession:

Does a Christian—first of all, he says, in a typical Kantian way—Kant says, “So what if a venerable presbytery or synod decides on a particular doctrine? It can’t be true tomorrow the way it’s true today.”

Listen to Finney: “That the instrument framed by that assembly should in the 19th century be recognized as the standard of the church or of any intelligent branch of it is not only amazing, but I must say that it is highly ridiculous. It is as absurd in theology as it would be in any other branch of science. It is better to have a living than a dead pope.” And chapters six and seven of his Systematic Theology are “Obedience Entire.” Here’s what he says, going back to your reports, Walter and Justin. “Does a Christian cease to be a Christian whenever he commits a sin—whenever he sins?” This is his catechism, I guess—his answer “Whenever he sins, he must for the time being cease to be holy. This is self-evident.” See, this is his Kantian language. This is Enlightenment language—“self-evident.” You know, you get it in the Declaration of Independence—self-evident truths. “This is self-evident: whenever he sins, he must be condemned; he must incur the penalty of the law of God.” So, see his logic there—Whenever you sin, at that moment you are not holy and therefore condemned.

Continuing: “He must incur the penalty of the law of God. If it be said that the precept is still binding upon him, but that with respect to the Christian, the penalty is forever set aside or abrogated, I reply that to abrogate the penalty is to repeal the precept. For a precept without penalty is no law—it is only counsel or advice. The Christian, therefore, is justified no longer than he obeys and must be condemned whenever he disobeys, or antinomianism is true. In these respects, the sinning Christian and the unconverted sinner are upon precisely the same ground. Full, present obedience is a condition of justification. But, again, to the question: Can a man be justified while any sin remains in him? Surely he cannot, either upon legal or gospel principles, unless the law be repealed. But can he be pardoned and accepted and justified in the gospel sense while sin in any degree remains in him? Certainly not.”

He says “the Reformation’s formula, ‘simultaneously justified and sinful,’ is an error that has slain more souls, I fear, than all the universalism that ever cursed the world.”

Bob Hiller:

He has a flair for the dramatic, I’ll tell you that.

Walter Strickland:

Yeah. Mike, the next sentence is, “For whenever a Christian sins, he comes under

condemnation.” There you go—not even grief because of their sin, condemnation—and must repent and do the first works or be lost.

Bob Hiller:

So if you go back to our first episode in this series—I mentioned this sort of theology in which Luther was—this negative theology where it’s constantly looking inside of yourself to see just how sinful you are. That’s what we’re back to with Finney, only Finney is, I think—I mean, I think he’s left Christianity altogether at this point. This is strict Pelagianism with no miracle. I mean, it’s just terrible.

Michael Horton:

This isn’t looking inside you to find out how sinful you are so you’ll flee to Christ.

Bob Hiller:

Right? It’s to fix yourself.

Michael Horton:

Yeah, fix yourself.

Bob Hiller:

All right, so here’s the deal: Finney wants us looking inside ourselves. When I was preparing for this episode, I found some old paintings and I saw one. I couldn’t figure out why it was on the Finney page, because I thought it was a picture of Joseph Smith out in the trees in the wilderness of New York, praying to God and having this experience.

Turns out it was Finney. The paintings of Finney and Joseph Smith are kind of the same. So this gets me thinking—you’ve got this whole district out there of crazy theologies coming up at once. Revivalism with Finney, you’ve got Joseph Smith and Mormonism coming out of there. You’ve got the Millerites coming out of there. So why don’t we shift now—over Adventism? Yeah, the Millerites, who—the Seventh Day Adventists come from the Oneida group.

Let’s talk about some of these other strange things that are coming out of the— Because Justin was talking about this at the beginning. There’s this weird mixture of all this stuff happening sociologically, and the religious result is—well, it’s a chaotic nightmare. So, what do you guys think? Where do we want to start?

Michael Horton:

First of all—maybe we could start with today and work backwards. Look at the situation today where you’ve got ex-evangelicals—a lot of people walking out of boomer churches that were all hype and Finney’s kind of methods, or with fundamentalism and “fix yourself” and political causes and so forth—they walk out and many of them become “spiritual but not religious.” Well, now you’re talking about the Burned-Over District in upstate New York of Charles Finney, where people are ex-Finneyites turning to these mind science cults, what we would call New Age movement things, Joseph Smith, and the multicolored coat and so forth.

So, it’s a swirl of things. Almost all of these movements—Christian Science, SDA—almost all of these movements not only happen on the heels of Finney’s revivalism in upstate New York but come out of them. Almost all the leaders, including the first signs of feminism—the feminist movement in America—they all start in that region of upstate New York, the Burned-Over District. Most of the leaders of all these movements were in the anxious bench, sitting in the anxious bench while Charles Finney was preaching to them.

Bob Hiller:

So, you have this charismatic leader who, in a certain sense, is anti-institutional. I think Finney, who refused seminary (God bless him), until he got to teach at one. He just sort of opposed the institutional kind of stuff. So now you have these people who have been through the anxious bench, who have to have their own experience with God, and they each have their own experience with God, and God’s telling them different things.

For some reason, there is a great deal of fear going on up in that region, because they all start talking about being right and pure for the end of the world. And the Millerites, in fact, I think, predict the end of the world. Now, I don’t have the dates in front of me.

Michael Horton:

Yeah, the exact—

Walter Strickland:

It’s October 22, 1844.

Bob Hiller:

But they were wrong, so they had to recalibrate and it was like a few months later.

Michael Horton:

It was so psychologically cataclysmic that it's called in history "the Great Disappointment."

Bob Hiller:

The Great Disappointment, yeah.

Michael Horton:

But see, once again, this goes back to the Industrial Revolution and the model that's used here. Like Charles Finney, all you have to do is calculate the right methods—purely human methods—to create conversion, repentance, revival, and perfection. All you have to do for the second coming of Jesus is calculate the dates.

It has nothing to do with Jesus saying, "You will never know that. You don't know. Even the Son of Man doesn't know the time or the hour that the Father has appointed by his own calculation, his own determination." No, we can calculate this. We can do the math and figure it out.

God, really, increasingly becomes a prototype that we can manufacture on a factory assembly line. God becomes really— It's not hyper-supernatural, it's anti-supernatural. In fact, it's deistic—you don't need God. It's like the prosperity gospel—you don't need God for this. All you need to know are the secrets of the universe, the laws of miracles and so forth. And God? God's out of the picture.

Bob Hiller:

It's mechanical.

Walter Strickland:

Those secrets of the universe emerge in some of the—even the clean eating movements. We've already mentioned graham crackers as a very processed health food, but a health food considered by them nonetheless. Opposing things like processed or bleached flour, moving towards whole grains, vegetarianism, temperance, and even the YMCA as a means of wholesome recreation, fitness, and things like this, and a certain way of being masculine. All these things are ways to move towards something, but in a way that's attainable by human effort.

Bob Hiller:

All I know is that graham crackers initially were bland and had no flavor, and now they're one of the greatest things you can ever put into a dessert.

Michael Horton:

Yeah.

Bob Hiller:

Oh my gosh—ice cream, marshmallows, and chocolate. Man, this just—you know, it's nice that we corrected that heresy of bland graham crackers, because that's a terrible plan.

Michael Horton:

That was a good one. There were other sects that came out of this, and by the way, they were joined by radical pietists from Germany, who were given the Left Boot of Fellowship and came over to the West. They formed colonies that were very closely associated with Finney colonies in western New York and also in Indiana; they kept moving westward. The Oneida community, the Amana community—do these sound familiar? Now we have their—

Walter Strickland:

Their appliances.

Michael Horton:

Their appliances.

Bob Hiller:

Oneida is the silverware company. They started as quite a fascinating little group.

Justin Holcomb:

Say more, Bob!

Bob Hiller:

I'm trying to find all my notes because I don't want to get this wrong, but they had this view of society where they had no marriages, but it was communal—approved marriages.

Walter Strickland:

Yes.

Bob Hiller:

It turns out that community lasted in such a manner for about one generation, and they realized “this isn’t great, but, you know, we can make money on silverware.” So now we still have—

Michael Horton:

These groups—the Ephrata community, the Amana community, the Oneida community, a lot of these different—the economy community, which actually Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels based a lot of their ideas on (their socialist ideas).

Bob Hiller:

Oh, interesting.

Michael Horton:

These are Anabaptist Pietist communities that said marriage is wrong because, basically, the Age of the Spirit is going to lead back to the time before there was a separation of humanity into male and female. We will live like the angels, neither marrying nor giving in marriage, which is going back to Adam and Eve before they were created male and female. That original androgyny is what we’re after.

Justin Holcomb:

And that’s what makes sense of the whole thing about Schleiermacher being what we said last time.

Michael Horton:

Yeah.

Bob Hiller:

It all comes together!

Walter Strickland:

Yeah, this is wild—to use a technical term. But the androgyny piece is so interesting, because we do have the emergence of this more masculine Messiah, this Christian masculinity, the initial engagement with women’s—I don’t know if it was suffrage, but just feminism.

Michael Horton:

Yeah. So, women’s feminism on one hand, and masculinism on the other.

Walter Strickland:

Yeah, but then we have this idea that you said—they're moving toward androgyny. How do those things even hold together?

Michael Horton:

Well, it goes way back to Plato's Timaeus myth of how the human race was one soul, and then they were separated into bodies—male bodies and female bodies. But the goal is to go back to being one soul without bodies. So, we're androgynous.

Well, that just crept into the Gnostics and other groups, all the way down to the radical pietists who thought that we're going to get back to before Eden. They didn't want to go back to paradise—they wanted to go back to before paradise, before there was any distinction between genders.

Bob Hiller:

Well, when you look at this—I mean, I think this is actually very insipid and incredibly dangerous.

When God creates the heavens and the earth and creates creation, it seems that He's laid out for us a number of institutions: there's the family, and then there's the relationship to God (so, the church), and you've got the relationship to the community around you, which we might call the government.

And these groups—they become their own communal group away from the government, they start their own form of religion so they're not part of the church, and now they're undermining the family by getting rid of male/female distinction, the way in which— So, there's a Gnostic reality setting itself in place that says, "There's no institution, we just have to make it up, and we'll follow the spirit." It's very anti-institutional and therefore very anti-body, very anti-human. I mean, we don't need male, female, all that kind of stuff.

Michael Horton:

Yeah, it really does lay a lot of groundwork for where we are right now, doesn't it? You look back in Germany where they were trying these experiments out—also in the Netherlands, in Amsterdam in particular, you had this group called the Collegiance movement, which was basically the Remonstrants—the Arminians who were kicked out of the church, who then formed their own communities, basically the early liberal Protestants, which is different from Wesley's Arminianism. But anyway, then they invited in the Mennonites, the General Baptists

(who were different from the Calvinistic Baptists and the Arminian Baptists), and the Quakers and others and set up this thing called the Collegiance movement, where they met in conventicles that were very toned down doctrinally—no creeds, no confessions, no clergy.

And in those sects, you had similar ideas of democracy, complete egalitarianism. For example, one of the leaders of that sect brought this to the New World in Maryland, in Delaware—the whole state of Delaware was part of the New Netherlands and was given to him and his sect before the British took it over. So, you have—it goes way back. It's basically European radical pietists coming over to America and joining the radical pietists and radical Puritans who were already here.

The more we study history, the more we realize that we're living it. As William Faulkner said, "The past is not dead. It's not even past." What we call history is actually the movements, the trends that shape who we are, what we tend to think, the world we tend to take for granted. That's certainly true in the church, where a lot of things that have gone before us, a lot of figures who have gone before us, have sometimes challenged the way Christians have thought throughout history and the way they've practiced their faith.

So, it's very important for us to understand where we've come from in order to know where we are and where we're going, so that we can take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Thanks for listening.

ON THIS EPISODE

- **Michael Horton** (Ph.D., Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and Coventry University) is the J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California and Founder & Editor-in-Chief of Sola Media.
- **Justin Holcomb** is a Senior Fellow with Sola Media's Theo Global. He is also the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida, where he has served as the canon for vocations since

2013. He teaches theology and apologetics at Reformed Theological Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

- **Bob Hiller** is the Senior Pastor of Community Lutheran Church in Escondido, California. He is also the author of *Finding Christ in the Straw*.
- **Walter Strickland** is Assistant Professor of Systematic and Contextual Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has contributed to, edited, and authored multiple books in his areas of research interest, which include the African American theological tradition, education theory, and theology of work.