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Disagreements About Systematic Racism, How to Approach History, and Recommended Books on Slavery

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

Originally released on June 10th, 2020, Kevin DeYoung, Collin Hansen, and Justin Taylor discuss the morality of laughter, the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, their disagreements about systematic racism, how to approach history, and their recommended books on slavery.

Transcript

[Music] This is Life in Books and Everything hosted by Kevin DeYoung, Justin Taylor and Colin Hanson.

[Music] Greetings and salutations, good to have you with us for life and books and everything. I am just reading our names off of the squad cast screen, Rev Kev, with Colin Hanson.

And I am probably having technical difficulties, Guy. That's Justin. Glad to have you all with us.

[Grunting] Thank you. Sounds perfect. I would like to start us in a little different direction and we will get to, you know, there's lots that we could talk about in the world around us.

And I think that's really important things. And, you know, the three of us have been communicating that we're walking this, this delicate balance here that this is Life in Books and Everything. And so we want to talk about books, but I guess there's life and there's everything in there.

And, you know, on certain weeks, I mean, we would be derelict if we had never said anything about coronavirus, just happily talking about books as if there's no global pandemic or talking about life as if there is not a major historical moment going on as best as we can see in our country regarding race. So we will talk about some of those things. And yet there are lots of podcasts out there that give you the latest on current

events from a Christian perspective.

And those are really helpful and we're not trying to duplicate that. So with all that as a preface, I wanted to start before we get to any of that. And this may sound like a weird place to begin, but I'm reading a book right now.

It's about 10 years old, 15 years old. It's called the Morality of Laughter. And I'm not very far into it, but at least one of the basic arguments is laughter and humor is not simply a distraction or merely a pleasure to enjoy, but it's a universal human phenomenon.

And more than that, when done properly, it has salutary effects that often laughter is, I mean, not always, there's just silly gags and things and people getting hit wherever with baseball bats, but there are, there can be a morality to laughter. That's the argument that it's teaching you something about vice and virtue in laughter. Now, all of that is a segue to say, how do you guys think about in the midst of 2020, which is, it seems like by any measure, not the year that people were planning for? How do you balance their weighty things going on, really heavy things? We don't want to bury our head in the sand.

And yet, do you, do you give yourself permission to watch a funny movie, to listen to a, you know, Netflix stand up, do you laugh? How do we handle the weight of these times and still have the human element and joy and pleasure and laughter? Have you guys thought about that? Colin, how do you assess the mood that we're in as a country and who we are as human beings trying to navigate that mood? I wonder, Kevin, if it's contextual, because we probably remember that time when John Piper was speaking before a group of Christian counselors. And he's talking about all of these serious, serious weighty manners of the transcendent glory of God. And I can't remember Justin.

What was the story? Were they just not prepared for it? Or was there something else that came out about that news? What was the, what, what, what, what turned out to be the case? Yeah, I don't think there was some profound backstory. They just were primed when somebody was talking about themselves very seriously without any sort of warm up that it must be tongue in cheek or for effect or something like that. Yeah.

When I've noticed also that sometimes a church can take on or a friendship can take on a certain measure of frivolity or even sort of like distance through sarcasm. And so I've actually been thinking about this lately as an elder in my church that I've noticed that a lot of the times our interactions, at least initially, are very ironic and detached and thinking about how I don't, I don't actually think that's very helpful for us as elders. I don't think it's in keeping with our office.

So I want to say off the, off the bat that there are a lot of occasions where I don't think it's particularly helpful and it might actually be harmful. And probably we live in a frivolous culture. And so probably we need to be especially aware of that danger.

At the same time. I mean, I love to laugh. I hope that comes through on this podcast.

Every, every friendship needs a big laugh. I was telling my wife this Colin. And you have the.

Here we go. It's a real joy. I mean, it really is my good friend, Jason Halopolis.

You know, he has a big laugh. It's just great. Somebody who it fills the room.

So thank you for having a big head. I do have a very large. Not, not in pride, just physical.

Just simply large head and laughing loud. It's very true. It's very true.

The things you miss on a podcast. Can I wear a hat? Yeah. Yeah.

It just has to be big. It has to be like size eight. Well, that's why you notice they don't say one size fits all anymore.

They say one size fits most. Oh, I didn't know they do. There's some loss in a lot.

There's some wear behind there. It has been a lie. All these years.

Yeah. No, I know. Yeah.

No, I get it's about, you know, about a size eight, which is, which is pretty, you know, pretty, pretty large. But no, I do, I do love to laugh. And I will say there are plenty of things about me that my, my wife graciously overlooks, but that is one thing that she also appreciates in our marriage.

So it's just part of, I think. I mean, I, it's interesting, Kevin. A lot of people would think they know me.

I'm a very serious person because I talk about a lot of serious things like we do on this podcast and serious books. And this podcast is going to get into some of those topics. But I just don't see that as inconsistent with, with a joy out of life and out of an appreciation for the absurdity of so much.

And also just a passage I came across this last week reading Psalm 94 19, when the cares of my heart are many, your constellations cheer my soul. And I don't know that that necessarily has to be merely abstract. But I believe that this can be a very real mark of, of a Christian is somebody who's willing to even sort of, even the midst of evil in a fallen world to find the joy of Christ and to, and to laugh and to enjoy that friendship.

So hadn't thought about this a lot, but I just, I'm just going to hold out that those things are not mutually exclusive. Justin, what do you think? I mean, Justin says a humor, as you guys know, I listened to the podcast is different. You got to be listening for it.

And so even last night, Justin, you're, you're poking fun at one of our friends on Twitter. And he can't even tell. That's not real.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

I wish there was an acronym for laughing on the inside. Yeah. Oh, that would be me.

Yeah. I think it's a great question. It sounds like a great book.

And I've always loved the C.S. Lewis quote, where he says he loves nothing more than the sound of adult male laughter, which is just, you imagine Lewis sitting around with his friends in the pub and laughing and smoking and drinking and talking about profound things. And the fact that he loved that sound more than anything else. I think it's just a beautiful little thing.

And yet you don't think of him as a, somebody who's just being silly or just, you know, telling jokes to tell jokes. But there's kind of a profundity to it and a depth to real laughter versus just the laugh track. My, my wife and I were in the car that they're in.

The kids were listening to. I love Lucy episode in the background. And if you're watching something like that, you don't really notice the laugh track.

It, it kind of goes along. But if you're just listening and all you hear is the can laughter. I mean, it's funny, I guess, for a little bit, but it's very annoying after a while.

Just kind of fake laughter. But I think there's biblical grounds for holding to the complexities of life like Colin was saying. I mean, the book of Ecclesiastes talks about different seasons.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 6, 10 says that we are to be always sorrowful and always rejoicing at the same time. So I think our emotions can be complex because life is complex. The Bible is ultimately from a literary standpoint, a comedy in the way in which it ends.

There's surprise and there's joy and there's breaking in and there's unexpected reversals. So I do love to hear good laughter. I have to hear Colin laugh.

I love to laugh on the inside. I love to love to tell dad jokes that my 15 year old son laughs very loudly at them, but nobody else does. So, well, it's nice that they still laugh at them.

I know. I appreciate it someday, I think. Yeah.

Well, maybe I'm just doing my own self therapy here. I remember when I was a camp counselor in college one summer and you got to the end of the summer with all the counselors and we did a big affirmation circle. That's cringe worthy enough.

You get in the middle and then every all the other counselors have to say something about you. Inevitably, it was the really serious people that got the godly holy. You know, I see the glory of God in them and the funny people got crazy spirited and I was jealous for some of the other ones.

So it's taken me a long time. Which one was yours? No, I was the funny guy. And I remember the camp director saying, I didn't get what I thought I was getting with you because when I interviewed, he's probably asking about what I did for fun.

I'm a college student. I read Calvin's commentaries. Well, that's sort of one sort of side of me.

I mean, that's a that's that is a laugh track. That's a riot, but it's taken me a long time to be okay with. Yeah, that's how, you know, and your your warning is good, Colin, not to be jaded, not to be sarcastic, not to be the person that's always I remember one pastor that we would all know saying in a very good self deprecating way that, you know, his, his bus of church people was showing up to it like a mission trip where another bus of church people and his bus got off and it was they were all yucking it up and the other bus had been praying or something and he thought, I don't know, am I doing something wrong here.

So there's always a danger, but I think it's really healthy to realize some people have really serious personalities and they shouldn't try to be funny, especially, especially if my rule when I teach students and you're preaching, if you're not funny in real life, don't try to be funny in the pulpit. It'll be worse. It doesn't magically transfer.

No, it doesn't. Even though, even though the standards are very, very low for bastards. But I just been thinking about this because on the one hand, I do not want to be, you know, I'm very weighed down by all these things happening.

I didn't think I could be more weighed down than I was with coronavirus. And then all of all of this. I mean, it's just very heavy to watch the George Floyd.

It is almost excruciatingly heavy. And we don't, but I remember Andy Crouch, you know, a couple of weeks or last week wrote that article about watching less news. And one of the points he made was, we're not trained.

We're not trained to take in violence and then conflict constantly. And we're just getting that. And it seems to me that, you know, the biblical world had some healthier models.

You know, somebody would die. They'd have a set season. You mourn for 30 days or for 40 days.

This is feasting. This is fasting. This is mourning.

This is rejoicing. And it's just very hard. So I don't want to be running away from those uncomfortable moments at all.

And yet I do think sometimes people need permission that if you think the only way to deal with the crisis, honorably, is unending, seriousness, you just can't do it and you can't last and you make for an ordinary person. I don't know what the Bible doesn't seem especially concerned with giving us these aspects of personalities. We know a little bit more about Jesus in this regard, but we don't know a lot.

I don't think about a lot of the other characters, the figures and the people in the Bible. But I do think in history, we have some examples and I don't imagine a lot of us think that Calvin was a big laugher. Probably not.

That doesn't seem that way. Doesn't seem like that way. Or doesn't seem like they found him to be funny.

No, no, no. Either way, but Luther, of course, was. Spurgeon.

Spurgeon was. And I don't think anybody, no matter how serious they are now, would regard Luther or Spurgeon to be somehow spiritually deficient because of that. So I think it's just another call to not necessarily baptize our personality as the norm, but at the same time to recognize the time that we're in and be wise and on our guard not to just fall in line with sort of the direction of the culture.

And what's challenging in our time right now is that everything is so prepackaged. We could log off of this podcast and immediately find the 15 funniest jokes on YouTube. It's just prepackaged for you.

And there's a distinction between getting comedy sort of prepackaged for you, which can be innocent and can be fun and can even be edifying versus finding things funny in real life because life is just funny. Babies falling over because they're tired. That's funny.

You know, ironic wordplay is funny. I think when we get into just, it's all sarcasm. It's all prepackaged.

We start to get unhealthy, I think, in the opposite direction. Yeah. So let's talk about some of what's going on.

And I have some thoughts. And you two are with me this time, so I promise not to do a 25-minute monologue on it. What was my feedback, Kevin? Good, if long.

You said about it. And so I thought, well, the if means maybe, maybe not. And you clarified.

No, it was long. I had some people say they appreciate it. I did not have anyone say I wish it were longer, but I only preached about 28 minutes the other week and my son

came up quick and just said, he was concerned like, Dad, that was so short.

Or like, are you feeling okay? So I'll let you guys go first. Just, there's so much going on. And let's set aside COVID unless you want it to intersect because it does as epidemiologists have reversed course now on what we can or cannot do.

But how are you processing all of the drama and some hope and some angst and some lots of pain and some violence? Everything we're seeing on TV protests and riots and police reform and Black Lives Matter and politics gone amok. Justin, what are you thinking and feeling to make sense of this present moment? Yeah, you know, going back to what you were saying earlier, Kevin, it is just a heavy time. I mean, the worst people in the world to judge whether something's historical or not are the people that are in the moment, right? But still does feel like trying to be as objective as possible.

2020 is one for the history books. I mean, from the President of the United States being impeached to global 100 year pandemic to what feels like a very different situation in terms of race stuff. And the three of us have been thinking about race and observing race and participating in the discussions and seeking to learn and to read and to contribute where appropriate for 20, 25 years.

I mean, for us, this is not some new thing like, oh, I've not really thought about racial disparities before. I've not really thought about police brutality. So this isn't new for us, but it does feel like something different is happening right now.

And of course, we need perspective to see if that's true or not. But it does feel like a heavy time. And I think it's the convergence of all sorts of different things.

There's there's the lament piece of just lamenting that this is the reality. There's the weeping with those who weep of, you know, as we're recording this shy Lynn. I think all of us would count him as a friend.

I published a piece that gospel coalition. I saw one. Brother referred to it as a modern day letter from Birmingham jail, which is, of course, high praise.

To read something like that, not viscerally feel pain and feel remorse and feel regret and. And just give 20 seconds. What was shy talking? I read it.

We've all read it. But just in case people have him, he's talking about his experiences doing it in a very humble, but very raw way. It's African American male living in Philly and DC.

I don't know how old shy is price similar to our age. Late thirties, forties. Talking about just the lifelong experience of white suspicion and driving while black and.

And it wasn't melodramatic and it wasn't a sob story. It was just saying here you want a

little window into my life and my experiences and my psyche and how this has affected me. And it was not a hopeless piece, but it was a hope filled piece because he's his heart is centered on the gospel of Jesus.

So all of that feels heavy. And then you throw into it the protests and you throw into it the rioting and the violence. And it just feels like it's adding weight upon weight.

I don't know Kevin if you want to talk about the protest as a separate item later if you want to talk about that now what you'll go ahead. Yeah, I think we should all support lawful protests and see it as something important and right that we have the right to do that and to want to stand for justice and to participate when we can. Seems also like we should be against violence and destroying property and looting.

It seems like we should also be able to to say both of those truths without hedging and not to emphasize one over the other, but to say we think this is right. We think this is wrong. And yet it's also disorienting like, like what are we protesting? Am I protesting the death of an innocent man? Yes, I am.

Am I protesting that I want the police defunded in every community in America? No, that's not something that I think is a wise idea. I think it would hurt the poor. I think it would hurt people of color.

So it's just disorienting. I think when you have a country of our size with the number of ideologies represented and warring agendas, try to put yourself in there and where do I fit exactly. And it's been hard.

I mean, really depending on what you read, your head just gets spun around. I mean, I read some things that it's their peaceful protests, a few extremists, you know, obviously some really bad nights, but, you know, some make it sound 95% of this are peaceful protests. And then you read other, no, these, that's the media.

These aren't peaceful protests or this particular situation wasn't and you don't have the full story. I mean, I don't know. I mean, I see tens of thousands of people in city squares.

And I think most people must be peaceful or that scene couldn't happen. And yet we've seen, you know, perhaps more earlier on some of the scenes at night. And I don't know if that's a too simplistic of a heuristic, but it sort of seemed to me, if you want to have a peaceful protest, it seems like the people doing that are probably arranging for it at 10 in the morning or four in the afternoon and probably not at nine at night.

So, you know, it's just, it's hard for any of us to know exactly everything that's going on. Colin, how are you continuing to think through it with your head and your heart? Well, I am glad to see across the state of Alabama Confederate monuments falling as somebody who's been a long standing proponent of historical education as well as study the Civil War in particular. I regret that a lot of people think that when you study the Civil

War, it means that you somehow appreciate the Confederacy or their ideals.

And I don't. And so, even though I, again, I love history and I love remembering and I think that it's so important. I think it is a strong if, if still symbolic step toward justice to see these monuments come down.

And that went out, including the one that's three miles from my house in downtown Birmingham. I think a lot of people do. Who was that of? That was just to soldiers.

It wasn't a person. Well, and now, now here's the, a lot of people just don't know the history. So for example, you think, why in the world would there be a monument to the Confederacy in downtown Birmingham? We weren't a city in the Civil War.

So there's nobody you could even feature. It's not like our city had some kind of favorite son who went off and accomplished something in the war. It didn't exist as a city then.

So then you start to understand the symbolic, but real role that these monuments played in reinforcing a certain kind of dominance and supremacy in those cases. So, you know, that was- They weren't put up in 1865. That's what I'm saying.

Exactly. They were put up in the late 1800s into the 1900s. And then of course, the closer you get now, you see this, a rash of different sort of uses of the Confederacy that emerged in the 1960s.

Of course, connected the civil rights movement in that case. And so that's so- I want to be clear about that because here in Birmingham, again, just a few miles from my house, we had that situation go down. And in fact, our church was told to expect via the grapevine some kind of property attack, which never came, thankfully.

But so we're kind of in the middle of that, and it was a little bit scary. But the point is, even though that kind of emerged at night, I'm still glad for the outcome. I'm very sad for my friends and others whose businesses were damaged downtown.

And it can so self-destructive because in here in downtown Birmingham, so many of the businesses that were destroyed or damaged were of course ones led by African Americans. I have been, my church, excuse me, my phone has been ringing off the hook in the last week and a half to two weeks with pastors, members, others just asking for, asking for counsel, just telling me their story. I get a sense that just in part of the historic nature of what's happening here is, there are a lot of churches in crisis right now.

A lot of groups of elders who are not remotely on the same page with this stuff, moving in in very different directions. And I think the part that's at least clear for me is that a lot of people are confused thinking that the protests and the response are directly or exclusively related to George Floyd and what was done to him. But they're not, and I don't think they're even specifically or exclusively about police brutality, but about a

whole wide range of frustrations.

And the thing about Shai's piece that we published today, and I give Matt Smithers a lot of credit, he and Shai have go back a number of years and they've been, Matt's been working with Shai and now was finally the time for us to be able to publish that article. And I'm glad we did, because basically for those people who might be in a different position, what Shai is saying is what so many of us hear regularly from our black friends. And I don't know guys what else I'm supposed to do except to believe them.

I don't have any reason not to believe them with what they say about these things. And so I don't over complicate this with a whole bunch of different sociological and political theories. It's pretty much as simple as I know what my friends tell me.

I don't have any reason to deny what they say. And I can see with my own two eyes what it looks like in the world. And I don't know about the debate, we can have a good debate about equality of opportunities versus equality of outcomes.

But I just have a hard time thinking that with the inequality of outcomes that we necessarily do have a level playing field of an equality of opportunities. At least I know in my own context that that's not true. So I don't know what that means more broadly, but I think was it, I remember there was an article that went around that was talking about systemic racism.

And it basically, you guys may have read the same piece. I don't think we shared it with each other, I'm not sure. But it more or less says if you're skeptical about what you're hearing from African Americans, just consider this.

You have a couple different options. One of them is that African Americans are simply inherently worse or inherently less capable. And that's why these outcomes are the way they are.

Well, if that's the choice you take, well then that's just flat out racism. Okay, so that's your one option. Another option is to consider that either current opportunities are not equal or the historical effects of racism continue to bear certain outcomes today.

So talk about dictionary definitions and cultural Marxism all you want. But that's basically just what systemic racism means. That things that happened in history still have an effect today.

And again, I don't want to get all of us in hot water there, but I just, I don't think it's that complicated. And I think we try to overcomplicate it. Kevin, what do you think? I think it is more complicated.

All right, bring it on. Well, let me not turn this into a monologue. I think I got 24 minutes left.

So I think. And I think that any, there are a number of things going on. That's a truism.

And I'm always trying to pull out what what we are really, and I don't just mean we the three of us that we disagree on some things. But what we may agree on and disagree on so that we can see more clearly. Oh, this is what our real disagreement is about here.

So that we don't miss where there is real agreement. So I say at least four layers. So real quick, one is the personal and I completely agree, Colin.

I, my instinct as a pastor and I think it's hopefully just a human instinct when talking to our friends is I hear what most, not all, but the overwhelming majority of African Americans I know and have known have described their experience in particular with police with. I believe them. I don't think they're making it up.

I think those things have happened. Even if they haven't happened to me and I haven't seen them. I believe that in.

I read Shai's piece this morning and I thought. Yeah, viscerally. What can we do so that does not happen now evil things happen in the world.

We get that. But if there's something we can do to minimize those experiences, I want to be a part of that. But there's also a personal level.

You just take police officers. Again, I don't have a lot of experience with police community, but the officers that I talked to, again, my instinct as their, as their pastor as their friend is to believe at least the ones I'm talking to who tell of all the things they're trying to do and how frustrated they are when something happens really bad that they hate. And now people shout death to pigs to them.

I agree with that too. I don't think that's fair. I don't think that's fair to hardworking men and sometimes women who are trying to do the right thing and hate the injustice that's there.

And so on a personal level that that's going on. There's the political level because everything is about politics today. And everything is, you know, what you think Trump did or what he meant.

And if you say something critical about Trump, then you must have really hoped that Hillary won and vice versa and not to mention that, you know, for a lot of, you know, most of our African American friends probably would say they're convinced that Trump, if not a racist, that he leads in abeds those who are. So that's a political question that's just there. And that's part of what the layer is.

Then there's the structural. And that's maybe where Colin, you and I would talk about, I think it's a little more complicated. I think there are more options.

I don't think any monocausal explanation for disparities is going to work. And I know you agree with that. Quick quick on that one.

When it comes to when it comes to the past, when I'm teaching about say history of Birmingham, it's kind of easy to be able to connect some of the dots. White flight doesn't make things go better in the city when white people leave. You know, simple things like that.

When it comes to solutions, the way I tell people, what I tell people is whatever you think is a problem, you're right. Everything. And just, but so yeah, I don't think there's like historically speaking, we kind of know how we got here generally, not not exhaustively, but generally.

But the problem is when you try to figure out what to do, you're like, well, if you want to tackle fatherlessness, go for it. If you want to tackle inequities in school funding, go for it. If you want to get better teachers, go for it.

So I just wanted to affirm. I completely agree there. There's no one call.

Right. And my point is some of what we're then talking about implicitly are these structural issues where, you know, again, I don't want to be quietest and say, well, it's just, you know, just pray and we never have to think about legislation or reforming the police. But I do think we need to have some humility, like Justin said earlier podcast, you know, if you haven't spelled the word epidemiology before, then don't pretend that now you know it.

So I don't remove and qualified immunity for police officers. I don't know. Some people that I like are saying that's a good idea.

I don't know. I haven't spent time thinking about it. And, you know, more than since last week.

So I do think we have to be careful that what we think is the right way to make the situation better becomes the Christian way. And again, it's not to say that there might not be a more Christian way or a better way or that there aren't good or right answers. But I think if we can at least pull that out, then we can say on a personal level, here's where I am, and I'm still thinking about the structural level.

And then just finally, there's a theological level. And that's sometimes what we're really arguing about. There's things that are easy to agree on.

We're all made in the image of God. We should have worth and dignity. And then there are tricky theological questions of group identity and how complicit are we for sins of the past.

You know, there's people arguing, I think, very mistakenly that, you know, we can just say to be gospel centered means, you know, there's gospel, there's justice, never the two shall meet. And yet we both know that there's also things that come under the category of justice that are a far cry from what the Bible means by justice. So there are theological issues and part of what I feel as a pastor is, you know, this sense that what am I trained to do? Well, I hope is the personal side of talking to people, listening to people.

My instincts are, I believe you, I sympathize with you, I support you. That can be hard when you have some subset of people saying one thing and another subset. And I don't believe their stories are mutually exclusive, but they can be hard to just think of groups and understand them.

And then, you know, we're trained to do theology. We're trained to think about things the along. We're not experts in how we got here.

And more importantly, as you said, Colin, what's the next step to make things better. And that's where I do think some epistemic humility is in order. And I hope that I don't think it you should ask for a lot of patience or a lot of waiting before you can say everything we see about the George Floyd murder looks like murder.

I mean, just a heinous painful something you wouldn't even want to see in a movie in its real life. So you shouldn't have to say, give me three weeks to kind of think about that. Now, he's due.

The officers do his day in court. Certainly. But there are other things that I think we ought to be able to say, hold on a minute.

Have we, before we say we know exactly what the issue is and what the answer is, have we thought about it? Have we read more than a few blogs and podcasts? I mean, you guys have, I'm not talking about you, but I think there's a knee jerk reaction, say something immediately quickly. Everybody get on board. And I don't think that helps things in the long run.

Yeah, I think all of us, the three of us have a conservative impulse and presupposition that favors incrementalism over revolution and radicalism. I think that I'm not trying to speak for the two of you, but we're actually Birkeans as opposed to the alternatives. I mean, just put it in historical context.

Yeah, I think Merck was right about the French Revolution and Hamilton Hamilton was, you know, against the French Revolution. We have a suspicion of the progressive impulse that says, we need to just do something, anything. And then we'll think about the consequences later.

I mean, to see some of the discussion with the defund police, you know, we need to

defund police and we'll think about the alternative later. I mean, to me, that just grates against every single instinct that I have. And yet the thing that I've been bothered about in my own conscience as I look to myself is if everybody was like me, which is sort of my presupposition, if everybody was just like me in terms of race, it would be not a perfect world.

It would still be a sinful world, but it would largely be good. It would be better than it is now. But what things significantly change, would they change at a cultural level, would they change at a systemic level? I don't know that they would, and that's been bothering me in my conscience.

In other words, I like to work towards peace and justice and harmony in my relationships. I like to speak truth where I can, but by nature, I tend to like more respectable tactics and don't like revolutionary impulses. So, if you guys have thought about it.

Yeah, I have a question. Yeah, I think you're right. I think that's a good insight.

I'll give you an illustration when I was in my previous denomination was leading up a renewal group, which I don't think in the end was very successful. And one of the reasons that I often thought about, and I was the leader of it, and I don't mean this in any self-aggrandizing way. I'm just using an analogy.

I always felt like I had gifts to be a Calvin more than a Luther, meaning a careful scholar, study, write, read. And I often thought, to really affect some change here, we probably needed a Luther. We need somebody who was bombastic, somebody who maybe sometimes said something and went too far and needed to be pulled.

I could systematize, I could put it together, I could make it responsible, and you need that too. So, I hear what you're saying, Justin, there's more than one type of person who can affect change. So, that's well taken.

My caution was simply with pastors or Christian leaders. And there's probably some who really have given a lot of thought about this and can give a nuance and appropriate. But even then, I think it should be with an understanding in many of these cases with prudential arguments about this is we want injustice to be remedied.

We want these things to be better. Here's what we think. What I think, as I've said, is a good way to do it.

And if you disagree with how best to reform the police, it doesn't mean as a matter of course that you aren't on the side of justice. Now, I get it. We can be death by a thousand qualifications.

We end up just wanting to be so careful that you never, you know, you're saying all of your qualifications at loud voice and you're saying, well, of course, injustice is wrong with

a throat clearing, and that would be a mistake. The thing though, the thing is though, guys, that I feel like I'm so conservative that it actually makes me sound radical in these things. Here's what I mean.

So, when I talk about for civil rights history, race history in the United States, you have to deal with the question of what do you do with this information? And I think the younger rising generation now wants to condemn their parents, and they want to condemn their grandparents and say, we're nothing. We're not going to make those mistakes again. We're not going to be like them.

And then the previous generation that made the mistakes, they just want to kind of ignore it in a lot of ways. Just say, no, I'm not going there. But I don't think either one of those ways is very helpful.

So my conservative instincts kick in to say, I don't want to be naive. It's not like previous generations were perfect. I don't want to be self-righteous though, and say that I'm nothing like those generations.

Like, I think my conservative Christian orientation says, I'm probably more like them. And it makes me think this, like, you know how we're taught hermeneutically to be able to see, you're not David versus Goliath. You're out there with all the other people who are just like just sitting there on the sideline, watching the champion step forward and courage.

I think what gets me guys is that I am in so many ways, an incrementalist. I am in so many ways conservative. And Dr. King had a word for people like me.

He called me the moderate. And he read a whole letter from Birmingham Jail that was targeting the moderates there. And we remember those people as like, they all just get lumped together.

The moderates and the people who bombed, they were all just white people who were for segregation. They weren't. They were really different from each other.

And what's hard for me is that I see so much of myself in the moderate side of things and think, have I really learned the lessons there? And I just have to confess, I don't think that I have necessarily. So again, that might be a bomb dropping in there. But I think that's my conservative instincts that say whether, and by the way, I do the same thing with Whitfield or Edwards.

We have these conversations all the time. And I think people tie themselves in knots to get around what is, I think should be clear, which is even these titanic men of God can make huge mistakes. And if they can, I don't know how we can't.

So that just, that makes me throw myself under the grace of God all the more and trust

and ask Jesus to help me with that. Am I off base with that approach? Well, let's, no, there's more I would want to say about that. But somebody said that these go too long.

Me. Yes. So, you know, I do think that's a good, good word to think about who the moderates were.

Of course, as a, as a general, you know, rule of thumb. It depends on the thumb. Exactly.

It depends on what the, what the extreme is. And so let's, let's look, let's go into history. You made a nice segue to go into history.

And all of us like history and we realize that history can serve the present. That's one reason you read history and sometimes it helps you illuminate the present, understand the present. But we, I think we'd all agree that the first way to look at history is in itself to be fair with the moment.

So if you bring to history, what I want to get from the past is first of all, you answer my questions in the present that usually makes for bad historians. The way to start is to say, I want to understand, you know, the, the saying from the Skinner school of history, seeing things their way. I want to try to see things their way.

And then you can make application and you can even make critical application. But on this theme and not trying to necessarily use this particular genre of history to speak to the present, though inevitably it does. But I wondered if you guys have two or three books that have helped you, let's think about, along the general theme, about slavery.

Could be American slavery, could be, you know, some other kind of slavery. But we like to talk about books. We've all read books on this subject and can help fill out our, our meaning in good ways.

Justin, let's start with you. You would have been two or three books to help you historically understand slavery. Yeah, I really do have an interest in slavery and have purchased a number of books and really have wanted to read more about the institution itself.

There's a whole new trend towards writing about slavery and capitalism. The half has never been told as a new book. But to be honest, I haven't read as much about slavery as I have about the cultural context.

So the Civil War. So, Andrew Delbanco's recent book, *The War Before The War Fugitive Slaves The Struggle for America's Soul from the Revolution*. The Civil War was an eye-opening and helpful book.

So that tends to be more of my reading about Civil War. I have a strong interest in Abraham Lincoln. So Eric Foner's *The Fiery Trial on Abraham Lincoln and how he viewed*

slavery and how he worked towards emancipation was another, it's a masterful book in terms of historical progression.

I think two that have impacted me personally have been Frederick Douglass's autobiography of an American slave narrative, Frederick Douglass. So I was written in 1845. And to read that, it's hard to think of many more books that have the beauty and the pathos and the pain all mixed together because he's such a beautiful writer and a Christian as well.

So as he talks about the Church and the hypocrisy that he sees. Another book by a slave who was a Christian is interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano. If that's how you say it.

I've read it my whole life, but how do you say it? Orogustavisvassa. The African by himself, that was 50 plus years earlier, he came to Virginia and then ended up through convoluted series of events going to Great Britain. But that was one I listened to on audiobook.

And those are, you know, there's books about the history. There's books about the experience. And then there's books where someone tells their experience and first person.

And those are, I think, are especially powerful. That's good. Colin.

And for our listeners, we are working on a system whereby we can put these books in the show notes or link to them. We're working on that because we know we talk about books and you want to be able to look at these books. And if there's one thing we can say about our show, we move product.

We just moved product brought to you by Cactus Bread. Okay, Colin, you've read a lot in this and Civil War more generally. So what are some books have been helpful? Well, you know, I think Frederick Douglass is relatively well known and therefore it can be easy to dismiss him.

But when you just think about his life, it's just so remarkable. I mean, it's, I don't even know how to describe it. And I think that's one of the, it gives you such a window into the miracle of African American Christianity.

And I just, man, what an amazing work of God. And Douglas gives you a window into that. So one of the books that I'm reading right now, which I hope to finish by our 100th episode is David Blight's book, Frederick Douglass, Prophet of freedom.

I'm, I'm, I'm slogging. I'm slogging through. How long is it? Oh, 800 pages, I think, something like that.

But this is one of those. You guys are going to have to counsel me on book reading because my pride kicks in in a big way and tells me, Colin, you have got to finish these books. I don't know.

So the other one I'm sitting there with is, is Charles Taylor sources of the self, not about slavery, but I'm like, I must read these books. And I can't again, so Blight says, I'm making it through. It's very interesting, but series of the way of the Kings.

Ivan may say like 1000 pages. I'm 10 pages in, Ivan. So Kevin, do you, do you also abandon books? I mean, Justin abandoned books with abandon.

Yeah, Justin does with abandon. It does. It does hurt my private.

I'll tell you, I have just learned about too many times I have picked up, you know, the churn now style biographies. And I think this is going to be so good. And I know he's, you know, just world class.

And I think I, I'm not getting through this. I'm not getting through. So I just, I have had to temper myself from venturing on some of those massive ones that are, you know, really, really good, but it's a long haul.

Yeah, I think this is where Marsden's buyer, for me, hit a sweet spot. It's long, but it moves. And it's five, it's five, four, five hundred.

It's not. That does seem to make a big difference compared to that 700 800 page range. The other two that other two books that come to mind, and I, I will say no book has probably haunted me more than Mark Nolz, the Civil War as a theological crisis.

I don't, I just, I don't think we've ever theologically confronted what happened there. And the legacy that it's left us. I don't want to be specific.

If people don't think this is currently relevant, then consider right now there are debates on the Internet that more or less imply, if not directly teach, that you can't have biblical inerrancy without political confederacy. And it's easy to dismiss that to say that's crazy. Of course, you can have biblical inerrancy without the southern confederacy.

That must be a small group of people. It must be, but overrepresented among certain denominations that we would know. And so I do think it's small, but the thing about Nolz is that he rubs your face in the inconvenient truth that the southern, a lot of southern defenders of slavery were also rock solid theological biblical conservatives.

And that a lot of abolitionists were not. And that the southerners employed very specific biblical arguments for slavery, whereas the northerners tended to depend on more generic Christian teachings, like loving your neighbor, in ways that were appealing across denominations. That is a haunting book.

And anybody who ever wants to sit down and talk more about this, I'm always open for that because it just, it continues to haunt us today. And I don't think it's a coincidence that our debates about race and theology continue to be linked in ways that are deeply inconvenient and frustrating. Justin, do you remember the book I have it behind me on one of the shelves here, did Nathan Finn write an introduction to it but it's the dialogue between two Christians, north and south and 1840s or fifties about slavery.

One of them is the moral philosophy professor at Brown. Another one I think is in South Carolina. It's not ringing a bell, I have it behind me.

And it was very helpful just to read from what you would probably describe both as, I mean, somewhat moderate in that they were willing to talk to one another publicly, but to read their actual arguments for and against slavery. And, you know, I found the ones against it to be compelling, but you're right, Colin, there were arguments on both sides. Well, just listen, just listen to this from Noel.

For over 30 years, Americans battled each other exegetically on this issue with the more orthodox and the ones who took more, most seriously, the authority of scripture being also the ones most likely to conclude that the Bible sanctioned slavery. The reason I bring that up is because we do hear from voices today that have that same argument and then they conclude, therefore, you must continue to support slavery, including as it was practiced in the American south. And also, of course, before that, the American north.

That's a problem. Okay, Kevin, you got the book. I found the book, domestic slavery considered as scriptural institution.

So it's between Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, edited by Nathan Finn and Keith Harper. So that wasn't even on my list of three books. So I'll mention my books on slavery quickly.

You know, we talked to earlier podcasts. We just, you read and follow your nose and read in bunches and so it just happened in the last months before any of this current events happened. I was reading three or four books on slavery.

So first, Robert Davis Christian slaves Muslim masters white slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary coast in Italy 1500 to 1800. So really fascinating. It's called, he refers to it as the other slavery.

And some of the insights he says, for example, slavery has always existed. He said, what changed in the modern age is it took a leap in quality and quantity to become more efficient, which therefore made it even more deadly. So this is about the Barbary coast Muslim masters Christian slave so they, they're pirates and they raid trading ships about 90% of their slaves, therefore were men.

Interestingly, he says this Muslim slavery usually originated more as passion. It was more religious oriented or ethnic oriented, where he said white slavery transatlantic started out, started out, you know, business, now became something different. So 10 to 12 million Africans to the Americas over four centuries.

And he estimates about 1 million white slaves with Muslim masters from 1530 to 1780 so just a very different kind of slavery interesting book. Now this book by Catherine Gerbner conversion and race in the Protestant Atlantic world this is a year or two old I forget which journal it is one of the history journals I subscribe to but they just did an entire issue about this book. And her thesis which seems convincing to me, and is harrowing at the same time.

Her big idea is that as slaves converted to Christianity and she focuses more on the West Indies and does a lot of with Barbados that's where her scholarship is, but I think it applies to the Americas. Her big idea is as slaves converted to Christianity the axis of difference shifted from Christianity to whiteness. That whereas before there was a sense of what what makes us different is Christian and whatever he then pagan something else.

Some of them became Christians. And then most almost everyone it's okay well what, you know just they just, and this wasn't this is how people felt in the world, you know, different people are inferior. That's not a unique situation for whites but they were the ones in power and so they felt that.

And how do we now achieve that if it's not Christianity then it's to be white and she shows that the language develops in the West Indies in particular so her conclusion on the very last page is, you know, and this isn't a book that she's just hammering away at how evil missionaries were in fact she says on the very last page. It's this this horrible irony of history. She says some of the most self sacrificing faithful zealous missionaries who gave up life and livelihood to win black slaves to Christ were successful.

And therefore so the seeds of chattel slavery and in some cases then promoted and defended race base differentiation so he's saying it was because the missionaries went and were successful and they converted to Christianity that then whiteness became the differentiation. So it's a sobering book and pardon me wants to think it's not right but I think that sadly it is. Wouldn't that be true Kevin in terms of the American south as well.

The responses to the slave revolts in the 1820s and 1830s where increasingly the restrictions grow and the differentiations grow and you go from sort of like a reluctant allowance of slavery into an open like advocacy this instead of being tolerated slavery becomes a biblical good that's right time. And that leads in my last book because you're absolutely right. In many people if you just have a surface level understanding American history.

How much changed in the the first half of the 19th century and it changed because of slavery volts change because of fear and lots of things where slavery then became something that was vigorously defended and I do think it is important because it would be wrong to say that Christians throughout history have just defended slavery defendant no there there are papal and cyclical from the Middle Ages against slavery and Rodney stark has written about this and some of his books debunking some of those myths. And sadly among a lot of Presbyterians in the the pre war south where the most vigorous defenses came from but one last book. Also came out recently it's called no property in man slavery and anti slavery at the nation's founding by Sean willens and he is making the case that there is of course this paradox in the Constitution that on the one hand.

The Constitution was a compromise document because otherwise the lower South states wouldn't have ratified it. So on the one hand the Constitution did strengthen and protect slavery but what he's trying to point out and I think convincingly is that in an important way the Constitution refused to validate slavery so the title no property in man. So it comes from a specific debate and you can read about it in you have this book called the records of the federal convention of 1787 I think I think I'm going to misplace it.

Yeah well it has several volumes and it's good you can read all so this is from August of 1787 and there was a particular debate about the Constitution the taxing imposing of taxes on incoming slaves. And some delegates wanted the language to be of property and Madison or not saying Madison is spotless and none of the founders were but he makes a speech against this saying it would not be there is no property in man and we should not use the property to refer to slaves and so they change it by an overwhelming margin to refer to persons. And so Willens argument is in actually some of the abolitionists looked back to this during the 19th century as see the Constitution was sowing the seeds up seat it was saying they were persons now it's a mixed bag we know that but the Constitution Willens points out you know put a sit for 20 years after 20 years the slave trade can be abolished in America.

And actually when that passed some free blacks in Rhode Island celebrated that they saw that as a great victory for for blacks in America and ironically on the first day that it was allowed to be abolished it was abolished on January 1 1808 and who signed the law abolishing it Thomas Jefferson. So it's just it's in a microcosm you know hypocrisy failure to live up to our ideals all of those things but Willens book is a fascinating look at and at least he's trying to say without being Pollyanna Shabout about the founding but trying to say yes it was a paradox but there were some seeds there in the Constitution and some moments where because of course you know this you guys have read the history they couldn't have they didn't see what was coming you can't see what was coming. And so it was easy for those who oppose slavery to to compromise with the south and we could fault them for it.

They compromise thinking in their own minds you know slavery is not going to last 20

years will abolish the slave trade and of course they couldn't see that what would happen after post 1793 and how profitable and how lucrative it would be. And by the time of the Civil War. I think you know the beat is right about this it wasn't just going away.

It wasn't like hey give it a few more peaceful years and slavery will be gone. It wasn't it was profitable. And of course they didn't see that at the founding and so we can you know rule the fact that they made the compromise that they did but it's always important when we look at history not to simply not to ask first of all boy how.

How do they measure up with what we know today or what we would do but try to understand how they were seeing things so gone too long about that. Any last words for us Justin as you think about becoming more informed either historically or with present day situations and how to educate ourselves. I think the two things that come to my mind are to talk and to listen and we can listen you know talking it means speaking the truth and love and listening which is a prior step.

I don't like the idea of just always listening and never coming to knowledge of the truth never speaking truth but I think we can listen in two ways we can listen to the past so we can read narratives from slaves we can read analyses from historians. I think if we don't do that then we're just kind of swimming along with anecdotes and impressions and a good study of history is essential I think to make sense of the present so whether we're talking about reading civil war. I can't reading civil war history whether we're talking about reading civil rights 1960s American history I think both of those are essential but then not just to listen to the past but also listen to our friends in the present to hear what they have to say to hear not only their analysis of the problems but their proposals for combating the problems.

I don't think we should ever be in a position of saying just because someone has suffered that they've therefore know all of the solutions but we need to bring a biblical lens and a biblical perspective and humble hearts to it so reading and listening I think I know that's not rocket science that's not breaking any news here to enumerate both of those but those are the two main things that come to mind. And I think too I don't put myself as some great model of this but I can say honestly in the past two weeks I have deliberately tried to find thoughtful voices and sometimes it's I think I'm going to agree with this person and then I've tried to listen to some folks I think I'm probably not going to agree with this. So if if the truism but you know there's some truth in it if we only are listening especially on very complicated matters like this to the people and to the stations that we know already you're going to reinforce and reinforce what I think that's what I don't learn and if you listen to people that you don't agree with and you come out the other side saying that's why I really don't agree with them now I understand it better.

I do think in particular on this issue which is so personal and has so much history. We

need to really educate ourselves and listen. Any last thoughts.

No I appreciate you guys and I appreciate how we've talked about these issues for years. I appreciate your guys willingness to disagree with me. I appreciate your willingness to allow me to disagree with you or individually or whatever because ultimately I think that's going to be how we make progress I have a lot of faith in starting at least and pushing I mean not that we're starting with this problem but I see the biggest gap right now on education.

A lot of people especially white people just don't know they don't know the past they don't know the issues they haven't lived it. So yes just what Justin said right there you listen to friends you learn by studying and so less time on social media more time reading reading books more time making and listening to friends and then as the time comes for learning and for listening then there will be a time for living living it out living in different ways and ultimately in costly ways as well and so I know that especially our minority brothers and sisters are eager for for help in living out a different way. And I think we can do that go ahead Justin.

Just one more thing just because this is a Christian podcast I think we should not just assume the importance of prayer. And sometimes we know that this is wrong but I find myself always thinking you know that prayer is something expected but it's not the most significant thing and that the most radical thing is to do something else. Perhaps the most radical thing is to to set aside a half hour to pray an hour to pray to gather with people to pray and not to trumpet it on social media not not to announce our righteousness before man but to spend extra time that's not going to accrue brownie points before the world but we do have one who sits on the throne who cares about justice who will make all that is wrong right who can send his son back again.

So I love that somebody like Isaac Adams has a podcast called United we pray. I love that process publishing Mark Verogop's book weep with me that contains prayers and on racial harmony and racial strife so just want to not let the podcast close without not just calling listeners but calling myself calling the three of us to spend more time praying more time praying than tweeting he who calls us to pray leads us in prayer. Justin you want to close this out in prayer.

That's that's Collins nice way of saying Kevin you said we're going to end in an hour. I had like three other things I was going to say and they were all really really good but they were not as good as prayer. So that's that's an old pastor trick though you know we've been having lunch here we were going on an hour and a half well is there anything I can pray for you about.

My first rodeo Kevin. Well you know you've done podcasts before okay okay. Kevin do you want to say your things and then I'll close in prayer.

Oh look at there's a real friend they told me yeah they would you out Kevin no no no. I agree we should we should pray and I think we should allow that you know something that's as complicated as this has been happening for as long as this and trying to understand what it means in our own head and heart. You know I find myself thinking.

I gotta I gotta know what it is I gotta I gotta have the book in my head or the blog post that just makes sense of it all and helps everyone and maybe that's not you know your particular. You know bent but I've definitely had to step back and know I do need to pray and I say Lord help me help me to be courageous there's a lot of different ways to be courageous I remember Piper saying one of the one of the hardest ways to be courageous is. In personal relationships and talking to people in being courageous with your ideas and being courageous to be wrong and I remember Piper saying to and this particular issue with race just stay at the table.

Stay. Easier for people like us I know we haven't been at the table and doesn't cost us nearly what it costs other people but at some point if you talk about race if you care about this issue you'll be misunderstood you'll get something wrong. You'll you'll you'll be hurt or you will hurt someone and so to bear with one another love covers over a multitude of sins and to stay at it is one of the best things we can do so Justin why don't you pray for us.

Our father in heaven. We think you that you are our father that you have adopted us as your own. We think you that you are our father in heaven and that you are ruling and reigning that you are seated on the throne of grace.

We think that you love us and that you are working for the good for everyone who loves you and is called according to your purpose. Lord we pray for your kingdom to come. We pray for righteousness to be done.

We pray for there to be justice not just justice one day but we pray for earthly justice that those who do evil would be stopped and held to account. Lord we pray for humble hearts. We pray that we wouldn't always be quick to offer our solution or our hot take or our reputation of others but that we would.

Genuinely listen to the hurt and the pain of others and then we pray Lord that you would enable us to have courage to speak the truth and love. Help us to know when to speak and when to be silent. Keep us from anger.

Keep us from triviality. Give us a compassionate heart's Lord that long for the gospel to go deep into each of our hearts and to affect us not just at a personal level but all of society. So your kingdom come.

Lord your will be done. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. Thank you Colin. Thank you Justin.

So grateful for you guys and thank you everyone for listening. Glorify God and join forever and go read a good book.

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