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#114 NT Wright, Esau McCaulley & Tim Mackie on Reading the Gospels While Black Pt 1

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Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

In this bonus episode, hear NT Wright's conversation with Rev Esau McCaulley, author of 'Reading While Black', on race and the Bible and its impact on the Church. Tim Mackie of The Bible Project hosts. Broadcast with permission of Together PDX.

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Transcript

[Music] The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast.

[Music] Hello and welcome to the podcast that brings you the thought and theology of New Testament scholar and former Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright. I'm Justin Brali, Head of Theology and Apologetics for Premier Unbelievable and the show brought to you in partnership with Tom's UK publisher, SBCK, and NT Wright Online, who published Tom's video teaching courses.

Something rather special for you today. In May last year, Esau McCaulley, an Episcopalian minister in the US and author of Reading While Black, came together with NT Wright for a time of teaching and discussion on race and the Bible and its impact on the church. You'll hear the first part of the conversation in this special bonus show, broadcast with

kind permission from Together PDX.

Both scholars lead times of teaching, which are followed by Q&A discussions that were facilitated by Tim Mackie of the Bible Project. This presentation was co-hosted by Portland Seminary, Seattle Pacific Seminary, and Regent College. And you can find a link to the original show on YouTube with today's podcast.

Just a reminder too that you can find more shows from Premier Unbelievable at our new website, including Unbelievable, CS Lewis podcasts with Alistair McGrath and other shows too. You can also subscribe to our newsletter there. That'll give you access to the link to ask a question of Tom for this show.

Do go and visit at premierunbelievable.com. And just a reminder, we're launching Premier Unbelievable on a new footing at our conference on Saturday the 14th of May, helping you to unmute God, rediscover your authentic voice in a confused and divided way. Check out our list of speakers, the seminars and topics at unbelievable.live. You can come in person to the British Library London or attend from anywhere in the world online. And there's lots of opportunity to interact with our 10 speakers throughout the whole day.

Again, that's unbelievable.live and the link is with today's show. Right now, here's Kevin Palau introducing the conversation. Good morning and thank you for joining us from all across the Pacific Northwest for today's conversation with Dr. Esam Akali and NT Wright on reading the Gospels while black.

We have a huge turnout today because of this amazing topic and the amazing speakers. My name is Kevin Palau. I have the privilege of serving as president of the Luis Palau Association headquartered here on Portland's West Side.

And I especially want to thank our co-hosts for the first really in a series of webinars, but our co-hosts, Regent College in Vancouver, BC, Portland Seminary and Seattle Seminary. And it's so encouraging to see this kind of collaboration across these educational institutions to help us become better kingdom leaders in these critical days. And I mentioned this is a first in the series.

The next one is June 2nd with Dr. David Brooks and Reverend Jen Bailey building trust in an age of division. We also want to thank the NJ Murdoch charitable trust for their help in putting this on and for the amazing work they do all across the Pacific Northwest. And then also together PDX, which is a movement of hundreds of churches in the Portland area, working together on issues of justice, serving the community, praying together, sharing the good news of Jesus.

So with that said, let me open in prayer and we'll dive in. Father, we come to you as brothers and sisters in Christ across our denominational and ethnic distinctives desiring

to honor you and to reflect the beauty of the good news of Jesus Christ and the way that we live and the way that we treat each other. And so we pray that you would use a he saw in Tom and Tim as he guides the Q and A to make us more effective leaders and guide our time in the name of Jesus.

Amen. So today's event we're going to have two different parts two sections. Each time we'll have teaching from Esau and Tom followed by a time of Q and A, and then we'll have a quick five minute break between these two sections with the presenters will have a final Q and A at the end.

And to start off, I want to welcome our moderator for the Q and A portion. Dr Tim Mackey pastor co founder of the Bible project and all around awesome guy Tim take it away. Hey everybody welcome.

This is a really special event really good to be here with you all virtually. We've got a really large group of people that are eager to hear our presenters in the conversation today. Almost 1500 people, and you know I went into this thinking it would mostly be people from the US Canada.

And it turns out we've got people from time zones and countries all over the planet here as I'm watching in the chat. So some of you are so eager you're up in the middle of the night. And that's awesome we're so excited that you're here.

So this event it's called reading the gospels while black. This is going to be a conversation about how the good news that Jesus is the crucified and risen King of the world how that news shapes how we are thinking and talking and acting about these very critical issues in our time issues of justice and racism in our communities and in the church. And so we have two really special voices that are going to be speaking to these issues here today so let me introduce our speakers and tell you a little more about about them.

Our first speaker is going to be Dr Esau McCully. He's a professor of New Testament at Wheaton and Wheaton College and he's a minister in the Anglican church and he's become an important public voice on religion and culture as editorial writers. He's an editorial writer for the New York Times.

And last year you saw you released your second book, your first book was actually outstanding your published dissertation but it didn't turn out to be the best seller. Though it's really great on inheritance and messianism and the letter to Galatians but it's your second book reading while black African American biblical interpretation as an exercise and hope that has become a really widely read. And well received a statement that's addressing the role of the Bible in these important conversations about justice and racism.

So thank you for being here. Thank you for writing that book and we're eager to hear from you. I also want to introduce Dr Enthie Wright.

He has been a professor of New Testament and early Christianity at Oxford and at St Mary's College at the University of St Andrews. He served for many years as the Bishop of Durham in the Anglican community and he's now a senior research fellow at Wycliffe Hall in Oxford. We're really honored to have each of you here today.

What we're talking about are challenges in human relationships and society that goes back as far as we can tell issues of ethnic hostility. Racism and how racial inequities get woven into the fabric of our communities and even our churches. And so you saw on Tom, you know, for you to know this is a big audience here today almost 1500 people.

And these are ministry leaders faith leaders and church and nonprofit. So this represents an audience for whom alongside the pandemic, these issues of justice and racism. This is like the number one conversation these people are having.

And this is an audience of people who they want to act. They want to do something and respond, but they also are a group that wants to respond faithfully to the story of Jesus and to his vision of the Kingdom of God. And so we're going to do this again.

I have two parts in this first part, each of you, you saw, you'll speak first and then Tom feel free to just pick up and follow after you saw. And these are going to be opening statements and thoughts about a biblical perspective on these issues and then all be collecting questions. I'll talk about that in a second.

And then the second set of talks that each of you will give Tom and Esau will be addressing both historical and contemporary issues and why of these biblical perspectives and then again all moderated Q&A. One last note is that all of you watching virtually. You should see somewhere where you can submit questions.

And during the question and response time, we've got a crew on our side that's going to be fielding and monitoring those. What you can also do, I believe there's a feature where you can like like or vote a question. And so if there's a question you were going to ask, but somebody said it better than you, then just like that or vote that and we'll make sure to pay attention to the questions they're getting the most, the most attention.

And that's it. Thank you again everybody for being here. And thank you again Tom and Esau for being here.

We're really eager to hear what you have to say. So, I saw, I'll let you begin. Thank you all for having me.

I'm really honored. It's always a little bit strange to speak because you know for three and a half years. Tom was my boss and he directed me through my graduate program

but as they said, the part that I'm going to say now I didn't come from him so any, any mistakes that I make here on my own not professor rights.

What I'm going to do like he said in the first one is I'm going to give you what I want to call a biblical theology of justice so forgive me if this part, this talk feels a little bit more luxury. And I'll be a little bit more free and other discussion and the reason we're going to start with what I want to call a biblical theology of justice is because there's a lot of people who talk about justice and what does this idea mean this idea that Christian is going to be written for justice and what does it mean within a particularly Christian framework, except what I'm going to do for the next I don't know 15 to 20 minutes. So, any Christian discussion of justice has to start with God.

God as the God of justice. According to the Psalmist, God is the king who loves justice and who established equity. Psalm 97 says that righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne God's very rule is rooted in righteousness and justice.

What does it mean to say that God loves justice. I've meant you to say that one meaning that you could derive from that is that God loves fairness or right dealing. Deuteronomy says, for example, you must not be partial and judging here out the small and the great alike, you should not be intimidated by anyone for judgment it's God's in any case it is hard for you you bring it to me and I will hear it.

Say then that God loves justice means to say that God loves to see people treated fairly and that God intervenes when that's not the case. There's a danger here of oversimplicity. Because the moment he began to talk about God's justice as a quality, we have to qualify it or expand the conversation.

Because we don't always want God's strict justice. We want his mercy and his grace. The good news then is that God is not always just towards us.

This is clear from the beginning. God being gracious towards Adam and Eve, allowing the human story to go forward despite their sin. Grace again intervenes in the wilderness, where despite Israel's idolatry, God reveals himself as the one who is compassionate and gracious.

The Bible is full of passages in which God's graciousness for star strict justice. I have in mind here, place of like Psalm 51 verses one to 20. Dave, but is very happy in this context because God doesn't give him what he deserves.

And so there's an apparent tension here between God's strict justice, given us what we deserve, and his gracious desire to save those who call upon him. Much of Israel's history then involves God not enacting the strict terms of the covenant. Instead, as a manifestation of God's grace, he sends prophets to warn them again and again and again that if Israel does not want to experience God's justice, in the form of punishing

their covenant violations, they need to change their ways.

One of the things is really interesting here though. And this will get later on to our modern distinctions that have little to do with reading of the Bible. When God sends his prophets to judge or to call Israel back to faithfulness to the covenant, God tends to cluster three things together that we separate.

God, for example, when he sends the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah speaks about Israel's idolatry about the way in which they've abandoned the worship of one God of Israel. God also uses Isaiah to speak about how Israel steps on the poor. What does it mean those of you who grind the faces of the poor or the poor? And he began to talk about Israel's personal immorality.

So in other words, personal sanctity, fidelity to the one God and how the society treats individuals and manifestations of covenant violations. And God sends the prophets saying, you don't want my strict judgment or my justice, that we need to repent. The whole of the Old Testament in a sense is like God begging Israel for them not to receive what they actually deserve.

Justice. But this apparent tension then between God's justice and its graciousness is ultimately resolved on the cross of Christ where the extent of God's justice, graciousness and covenant faithfulness that revealed this is discussed in places like Romans 3 21 to 3 26. This is why God is both just in keeping the terms of covenant, the covenant and the justifier in the person with Jesus.

So when the Bible then speaks about God as a God of justice, it does speak about fair dealing, but it also has embedded in it. This idea of graciousness. So if you want to begin to talk about a Christian theology of justice, yes, the Christian has a theology of the way in which society should function.

But within the Christian theology of justice, there's also this mercy that over that over it's superintendents, the entire thing. So there's always the possibility for the person who's been engaging in injustice to begin again. The Christian tradition always has this opportunity for forgiveness and redemption and the chance to start over.

And the Christian tradition, even in the context and the fight for justice, we don't just easily throw people away. I'm going to cheat now and give you, and I'm not, I'm not, I'm going to hold back on some of the things I want to say for the historical discussion for later. So more about God, the God as a relation to the God of justice.

God, when the Bible speaks about God as the God of justice, this justice is often co located there's something that's often goes alongside a discussion of God as the God of justice. And that thing that is often co located is the concern for the needy. For example, you see something like Psalm nine, seven attached to Psalm 16 to 18.

Psalm nine, seven, sorry, nine, Psalm nine, 16 to 18. So God is the God of justice. And in that same Psalm talks about God is one who's the champion of the poor.

The Bible repeatedly talks about God as the champion of the oppression of people who are stepped on examples of this or places like Psalm 12 five, Psalm 14 six, Psalm 40 17. The poor can then turn to God for help when society is turned it's back on them. In other words, concern for the unjust is done towards the poor is a manifestation of God's justice.

Justice then is not somebody about fair dealing, but God's desire to see the oppressed receive justice. In the same concern is seen in the pro in the prophets who contrast God's justice with oppression of the poor. So God is just before you should impress the poor.

You see that in places like Isaiah 117 and Isaiah 10 12. Further, the prophecies that or depictions of the coming king that are that are wrapped up in the Messiah places of like Psalm 72 one to four and Isaiah 11 one to nine include as a part of the Messiah's coming reign. This idea that is going to establish justice fair to treat it.

It's better the people were stepped on. So we talk about justice as relates to God's own character. God shows himself as being the champion of the poor in the oppressed society and this messianic prediction of the coming or depictions of this coming king.

It's a king who's going to finally embody through his government. God's own justice. This same treatment though this ain't the same themes though.

A fair treatment with the particular concern for the needy is not just reserved for God as a champion of the poor. It is also called for in human to human interaction. God calls upon Israel to be fair to the rich and the poor alike in their interactions with one another here I have in mind passage like Leviticus 19 five.

The idea then is that God is that people is supposed to be impartial, but the focus of the multitude of biblical texts. This is the important part. It's not the protection of the poor the rich from the poor.

So the Bible is not concerned at excessively with the poor taking advantage of the rich. The concern of the biblical text from Genesis the revelation the overriding concern is the protection of the poor from the rich. For example, when Moses legislates against misconduct, he calls upon the people to take to avoid taking bribes against the poor and a lawsuit.

When God warns Israel's impending judgment, he then warns them of the judgment arises from not the exploitation of the poor by the rich, but by the rich who stepped upon the poor. It's important to note in this context, living a huge and focuses on focus on Israel. The God has the same concern for mistreatment as it relates to pagan nations.

So when Daniel goes to Nebuchadnezzar in Nebuchadnezzar chapter 4 verse 27, and Daniel warns Nebuchadnezzar of his judgment, he tells Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 chapter 27 that you can avoid this judgment that's coming upon you if you stop your mistreatment of the poor. So this is this seems to be something that God requires of both pagan and covenant nations. We see the same concern for the poor and the New Testament where Jesus begins his ministry by quoting Luzzan passages that speak about the good news being preached to the poor here have in mind Luke chapter 4, it's 26 to 21.

Furthermore, we cannot take seriously the idea that Jesus preached the kingdom of God without asking about the way in which that kingdom is depicted in the Old Testament. So Jesus is a vote in these host of images around the kingdom of God. Biblical studies teaches you, but basically Biblical interpretation principles teaches you to turn yourself back towards the Old Testament and say, what does the kingdom of God look like in that context.

And that takes you back to those same messianic passages that we spoke about earlier, where the king is the champion of the poor and the needy. Let's point out though in this context that Jesus's ministry to the poor was not limited to the healing of the sick and the performing of miracles. All the poor were not healed.

Christians believe that our ultimate healing is eschatological the resurrection of the dead. Jesus's ministry of mercy towards the suffering was meant to articulate the kind of kingdom Jesus will bring about during his second at advanced so Jesus is healing ministry as a manifestation of the kind of King that he wants to bring into place. Namely a kingdom of justice righteousness and the transformation of bodies and ultimately creation itself to participate in that kingdom.

The poor and the rich alike must repent of their sins and trust in Jesus. In other words, it's important to recognize that Jesus trusted the poor enough or respected the poor enough to give them moral agency. Believe me that through their holiness of life, they can reflect God's coming kingdom.

So the good news of the poor is not just that they get bread, but that they get the kingdom and the transformation of life that comes alongside with it. According to Paul, God is most glorified then and usually these very neglected people the step stone peoples of the world to manifest this glory. This is Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verses 1. So 1 Corinthians 1 verses 26 and 31.

The good news to the poor then is not only they might have bread, that Jesus the king or the universe, and vice them into his kingdom and his family through grace. The theology they need for the conversion of the transformation of the poor need not be put in conflict with a social analysis of the causes of the lead to poverty. These two things can be put together that the church can both be a witness of social transformation and a witness to

personal transformation to encounter with Jesus.

The church is tempted then to describe biblical justice as the fair treatment of others. Their flex God's own character with a particular concern for the ways in which individuals and societies often deny fair treatment and exploit the poor and the weak. The other thing is that this exploitation will continue until the law is returned, but nonetheless, like all other sins, God calls us to battle it nonetheless.

And with the time that I have left, I'm going to actually address something related to this. We talked a little bit about a biblical theology of justice with God's concern for the poor. God's concern for fair dealing with a particular concern for the poor.

But it's a doctrine that we need to kind of append to this, given the state of our modern conversation around sin and injustice that bring this whole thing together. Because sin and justice are related doctrines. So we can't speak of justice without speaking about sin.

What is sin and who can engage in it? Descriptive speak of sin coming into the world as a result of the fall. That's Genesis 3. And the idea of individuals committing sins against individuals or against God is not controversial. So we can just put that to the side and move forward.

But the Bible also depicts a possibility of institutions being sinful and dishonest. For example, we need to return to our discussion of the course in Israel. In Exodus 23 verses 6 to 8, it says, "You should not pervert justice due to the poor in their lawsuits.

Keep far from a false charge. Do not kill the innocent and those in the right for I will not acquit the guilty." The warning against bribes points to the ways in which money can create a context in which the poor are consistently deprived of justice. In Isaiah 58, God convicts or condemns the nation for creating a system of labor that exploits the workers.

We need to labor this point too much. But the Old Testament prophets often address kings. In the Old Testament, the kings were the government.

So all of the passages condemning rulers for injustice speaks to the reality of the societies itself or governments themselves being unequal. When we refer to the possibility then of corporate or systemic sin, we refer to the ways in which sin isn't limited to personal acts of animus. It refers to the ways in which societies can be ordered in unhealthy ways.

And this includes a society's economy, a society's social structure, a society's laws or some combination thereof, to take a less controversial analogy in the Western context. Lust is not simply something that exists interpersonally in the United States, but the entirety of our entertainment industry and large parts of our economy run on lust and desire and the commodification of the female of the male form. So how do we think

theologically or biblically about structural or corporate sin? There are two ways into this from a political perspective.

One way is to look at the link between sin and power. When someone has a sin, lust, greed, racism, and you add to that sin power, then the impact of that sinfulness can have a greater impact on society, it can spread from them to the right of world. A second way of looking at corporate or structural sins is to look at Paul's view of spiritual powers.

When Paul speaks of non-Christian world as the kingdom of darkness in places like Colossians, or he refers to the principalities of powers that rule the world in places like Ephesians. And when he says to the present evil age is dominated by spiritual evil and Galatians, it stands to reason that these powers who influence the non-believing world would create inequalities rooted in greed, exploitation, and racism. In other words, I'm claiming that the denial of systemic racism is rooted in an overrealized eschatology in which we assume that the kingdom is coming America.

Here the Anglican baptismal structure, service is instructive. And when you baptize in the Anglican tradition, I don't know what y'all are doing in your content, I'm going to talk about the Anglicans for a minute because Tom's here and I'm here. There's a threefold renunciation that you have to do when you baptize.

The first thing to renounce is the devil and all the spiritual wickedness that rebelled against God. Second, you denounce the empty promises and deadly deceit to the world that corruptly destroy the people of God. Third, you reject the sinful desires of the flesh.

In other words, as an Anglican, you reject when you become on your baptize, the influences of the world that society leads us to sin. The influence of spiritual powers lead us to sin and our own desires. So in other words, the Anglican baptismal service and baptismal service that undergirds most of our annunciations in any Christian context, assume its reality of corporate and structural sin.

So when we begin to discuss from a biblical perspective, the reality of corporate systemic or structural sin is clear. When the discussion of racism is added to it, it is simply the claim that the sin of racism is not limited to individual acts of animus committed by people with no social power. But it is an act committed by people who do have social power and therefore influence structures of society or it exists under the power of spiritual influences that also corrupt and distort the world in which we function.

And it's precisely here. The Christian charity is most needed. There is no theological reason to deny the reality of structural, corporate injustice in elements of society, including racism.

It would match the biblical doubt of the real question is why will we expect sin or racism as the one sin that the society we've evolved out of like no one believes that we're born

in a society that's not affected from top to bottom up covetousness or lust or greed. It's only racism. It's the one sin and society we've kind of figured we don't do that anymore.

But here's the thing. If it matches the biblical data, Christians of goodwill can disagree on the relative impact of injustice or racism in particular elements of society that's going to be disagreement there. And the best way to battle it.

The work of the belief in community then is to discern the nature of the problem to be able to identify it, describe it. And figuring out the best ways to make our societies more just and fair, recognize we won't be able to complete that task before Jesus returns. What is less helpful is assuming that articulations of these concerns around corporate or structural sin, a rational worldview that's antithetical to the gospel.

Instead, we should think the best of one another as we attempt to discern the mind of Christ. In short then, the scriptures, the tradition and reason lead us to acknowledge the reality of personal, and corporate injustice. And it has always been a part of the church's mission to battle that injustice, including the injustice of racism.

And that work remains a part of biblical faithful Christianity in our day. Thank you. Hi, I guess it's my turn to jump straight in.

I'm hoping that I'm coming through. And if I'm not then perhaps one somebody on the production team will tell me. But thank you for the welcome Tim.

Thank you, Esau, for all of you just said, I saw somebody on the chat saying, I need to take some time out and think more about this. And I think particularly your remark about the assumption that we don't have racism anymore is a kind of over realized eschatology. I guess really, really important that we are already the modern world and we've solved all those, all those sorts of problems.

That attitude is very, very dangerous. I did see somebody else say something which worried me when I was preparing this today as well, that the overarching title of this, this evening for me morning for some of you is reading the gospels while black. We haven't talked yet very much about the gospels and I'm not going to touch on Matthew Mark Luke and John very much in this talk.

But in a sense, that's the goal of everything that we're doing. For me, one of the great goals of the Christian life is being able to read Matthew Mark Luke and John and feel yes, we are on board with this story. And in a sense where we're hampered from being that and doing that by the sort of things that Esau's been talking about.

And because we haven't understood what actually much of the rest of the New Testament is about. So just some quick introductory remarks about the New Testament. And when we're dealing with questions of ethnic identity and so on.

First, there was no real color problem in the ancient Mediterranean world. There were people of all different shapes and sorts and sizes and especially colors in the Middle East as we would call it now. It was a melting pot.

It was on the trade routes. People came through from different areas people stopped people traveled this way and that. And particularly we have to remind ourselves, not least in addressing the American situation, that slavery in the ancient world, which was of course ubiquitous slavery had nothing whatever to do with ethnicity or color.

From time to time, some nations or peoples were enslaved by others, but normally to be a slave all you had to do was lose a battle or lose a lot of money or something and you could be enslaved, even if you'd been a prince in your own land. If you lost the battle, you might be enslaved. The major social divides in the ancient world, which colors so much in the New Testament, were between male and female between slave and free and between rich and poor.

And we see in the New Testament as a whole and not least in the gospels, a whole lot where those divides get blurred and crossed and different things happen. And the major ethnic challenge from the Jewish point of view was obviously that between the Jews and the rest of the world, the Gentiles, the Goyim, the nations. And with all nations, whether it's Greece or Rome or Egypt or Turkey or wherever, all lumped together as basically non Jews, the Greeks had a similar thing where it was Greeks versus barbarians and barbarians just meant that they talked, blah, blah, blah, nobody could figure out what they were saying.

So that was a way of the Greeks saying we're superior to them. And so there were other things like that, but they weren't functioning in the same way that the 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st century have seen questions that we now call race. They didn't think in the way that we do.

And one of the great things then, done with my little mini intro, one of the great things that we see right from the start in the early church is that they're having to grapple with issues of identity, which are to do with, if not ethnicity, at least related issues. The first controversy in Acts, Acts chapter six is because in the church in Jerusalem, the Hebrews and the Hellenists are not getting it together. This is a matter of distributing food for the widows who are being looked after by the church.

The church already living as an extended family, which is a major social experiment. It's extraordinary how they went for that. And the Hebrew speaking or probably the Aramaic speaking widows, and the Greek speaking or Hellenistic speaking ones, weren't being treated evenly.

And the church say, okay, we have a problem. We're going to pray about this. We're going to appoint seven people to sort it out so that the apostles themselves can carry on

with their ministry without getting into too much admin.

I wish that advice was always taken by people running churches, but that's a whole other story. But because the linguistic divide between the Hebrews and Hellenists was probably flagging up some other issues of local culture where people had come from the Greek speaking world. Jews to live in or near Jerusalem, but they would bring other traditions other ways of doing things to what the local native population would have done.

And then that's repeated in reverse in places like Rome and I'll come back to that where people go to Rome, but they maintain the cultural mores that they've grown up with in their own place. So then in the book of Acts, of course, we see Peter going to the house of Cornelius and Peter having had a little lesson from God the previous night or previous day, saying, I now know because God has told me that God shows no partiality. Peter is leaping across the Jew Gentile divide and he gets in hot water for it when he gets back to Jerusalem.

But then particularly in the church in Antioch, and this time it's Peter who has a hard time coming to terms with it, according to Galatians chapter two. In Antioch, Jewish Messiah people like Jesus followers and Gentile Jesus followers are eating together, breaking the barrier which would otherwise have existed, because Jews devout Jews believe that Gentiles because they were basically idolaters were unclean. And so you shouldn't eat with them, the different levels of restriction depending on the different groups of Jews, but for some you shouldn't even go into their houses.

Now, please let's be careful here, because it's easy for us to say, Oh, they were just wrong because they were being either racist or wicked or whatever but the whole Old Testament says that Israel is called to be separate to be special. And this from the New Testament point of view was part of God's build up to the coming of the Messiah, Israel needed to be separate from the nations so that then the Messiah would be able to come appropriately into the world. But part of the revolution that happens in the early church, which Paul is then in the vanguard of following Jesus as we shall see is to say, not that that was stupid or wrong or not God given, but that was part of the preparation, which has had its day and can now be rightly and safely set aside.

Not because Gentiles weren't idolaters, not because they weren't sinful, but because the death of Jesus on their behalf, on behalf of the whole world has dealt with the problem of sin and uncleanness. That's the great argument of Paul's letter to the Galatians, not that, Oh, well, we can just forget these distinctions because they're outmoded, but that in Christ, they have died to sin and come alive to a new life. And so have we.

So we are all one in Messiah Jesus. And that's why, for instance, in Acts 17 verse 26, Paul on the Ariopagus says to the grey beards of Athens that God made from one. All different types of humans.

There's a textual variant there, some says from one blood, but it's certainly from one from one source. However, you nuance that. And if only the church had grasped that message of Acts 17, we'd have been a lot better for it.

And the book of Revelation sees the redemptive work of Jesus in chapter five verse nine, not as something which will eventually result in a totally future state in a community of people from every nation and kindred and tribe and tongue. But that is the reality now. And in Revelation seven verse nine, that's repeated.

And again, this is the vision of the church. And it's the vision that you get in the church in Antioch. It's the vision that you get in the church in Galatia.

And in Galatians, particularly, an Esau and I have wrestled over Galatians happily together for many years now. And it's a little plug. I've got my own new commentary on Galatians just about to emerge and you'll see all this writ large there.

The problem there is that the Jews have been given permission by the Romans, not to worship the Roman gods. That was a big permission. And now suddenly, there's this new group of people who are partly ethnically Jewish, but a lot of them are Gentiles and they're not worshipping the gods either, because they say we are children of Abraham, because we are in Israel's Messiah, Jesus the Messiah.

And the Romans don't know what to do with this. The local Jewish community don't know what to do with this. They want to regularize it.

And Paul says, no, you don't, because there is a new reality unleashed upon the earth, which is a different kind of human family, neither June or Greek nor slave or free, no male and female. You are all one in Messiah Jesus. That imperative to unity across traditional boundaries is written into every letter that Paul wrote in one way or another.

And it's absolutely basic to the New Testament. And one of the things I'm going to be talking about in the second session is how on earth did Bible believe in Christians for hundreds of years, largely ignore that New Testament imperative. Because you see, it's there in Ephesians as well.

Ephesians 1, 10 says that God intends to sum up in the Messiah, everything in heaven and on earth in Him. And in Ephesians 2, we see how that's achieved. Jews and Gentiles alike are sinful.

God deals with their sin in Christ so that they are justified by grace through faith. That is Ephesians 2, 1 to 10. So therefore, Ephesians 2, 11 to 21 to 22, Jew and Gentile are standing on level ground and there is no divide between them.

And if Paul had seen the ways we have put up divisions in the church based on various ethnic categories so called, I think the Paul of Ephesians 2, the Paul of Galatians, the Paul

of Romans, I'll come to that in a moment, would have been absolutely horrified. Because in Ephesians 2, 11 to 22, Paul declares, and when you think of a Pharisee Jew saying this, you realize how important it is, that there is now a new temple, the dividing wall that characterized the old temple, keeping Jew and Gentile separate has been taken away, and now in Christ and by the Spirit, God comes to dwell in His Jew plus Gentile united family. And then it's because of that, that in chapter 3, he can say that through the church, the many splendid wisdom of God has been a polypochulos Sophia to Thayu, that's a lovely word, polypochulos, it's many colored, it's like what you get in a wonderful border of flowers with every color you can imagine there.

Paul is using that many colored image to say that when you see the church like that, then this reveals to the principalities and powers the fact that God is God and that Jesus is Lord. And if we ask ourselves in our own day, why is it that so many people in the wider world in the so-called secular world don't believe the gospel? One of many answers, there are other answers as well, is that the church has not been dispersed, and so on, so on. That the church has not been displaying the fact that there is new creation on the loose, that that's what God is in the business of doing.

One of my favorite passages for this now, and I've been working on this just recently for other reasons, is Romans chapter 15 verses 7 to 13. You know how it is when people expound Romans, he says, guiltily having done this many times, you spend so long on chapters one to eight, and then you know that nine to 11 are important as well, but you may be leave chapters 12 to 16 for maybe the last one or two lectures of the course, if you're lucky. And when you do that you sell yourself from the church and Paul short, because after the intro in 12 and 13 chapters 14 and then 15 through to verse 13, are where the whole doctrine of justification by faith really lands, because we are one people in Christ, recognized by and only by the fact that we believe that Jesus is Lord and God raised him from the dead as Paul says in Romans 10.

Therefore, Jew and Gentile must learn to live together and must learn to see the things which would have divided them in terms of cultural practices what they eat and drink, which holy days they keep etc, as basically indifferent. Paul is not saying you tolerate all differences, first Corinthians is quite clear there's a lot of differences in the way that people behave some of which are baked into their cultures, which one should not tolerate but should confront in the name of Christ. And then in 15, seven to 13 Paul says welcome one another therefore as the Messiah welcomed you to the glory of God, and he then lists several quotations from scripture, and you can tell when Paul really means to do this thoroughly because he quotes from the law and the writings, which is a good Jewish way of saying bang bang bang every segment of scripture is coming with you coming with me on this.

And the last quotation he has is from Isaiah chapter 11, and he quotes from verse 10, there shall be the root of Jesse the one who rises to rule the nations and in him the

nations will hope. And as so often in Paul what you have to do is to take the one verse and then pan back a bit and say hang on, what's that old passage about what is Isaiah 11, one to 10 all about. And this is about the fact that when the Messiah comes, then justice will be done, because God's new creation will flood the world with peace and harmony and the wolf will lie down with the lamb and so on, and a little child will lead them.

And the cultural destroy on all my holy mountain, because and this is the great biblical hope, the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, that have an eye as the waters cover the sea. How do the waters cover the sea, the waters are the sea. This whole vision of Isaiah one to 10 is a vision of God's coming earth filling glory in which all creation will live in harmony.

And here's Paul's point, you if you are in Christ, get to do this in advance. You get to be by your unity across traditional barriers, you get to be the sign to the world that there really is new creation that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, so that now because of that forgiving work of the cross, we can be all one in Christ. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, this is second Corinthians five, I'm quoting new creation, kinectuses, what will that look like, it will look like the peoples getting together the peoples being part of one another.

So this is the agenda which then we stand back and we say, hang on, where do we see this in the gospels themselves, well we see it right at the beginning, who was it came to welcome the Christ child in Matthew chapter two. Well, it was strange, wise men from the east, they certainly weren't Jews, the Jews would have regarded them as Gentiles, but they knew a thing or two and they're welcomed, and they have seen and they're following the star which they believe in God's good creation is leading them to Israel's Messiah. And then no surprises in Matthew eight, when a centurion shows enormous faith in Jesus, and Jesus says, yes, many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God.

This is the promise to which Jesus is faithful to which the gospel writers are faithful, so that even though Jesus own short public career is focused on the lost sheep of the house of Israel, as he says, and as he tells the disciples to stay focused on. Nevertheless, once he has died and been raised, then he says, go into all the world and announce the good news to every creature, Matthew 28. And so we see again in say Mark chapter seven, when the Syro-Phoenician woman comes and Jesus and she have a bit of a to and fro banter and I think there's a twinkle in Jesus eye at that point, when he's teasing her about, actually I have a specific ministry and you at the moment aren't involved in that she says well, I'm happy to be a child under the table, I'm happy to be a dog under the table eating the crumbs that the children let fall.

We find that quite offensive. I suspect as I say that Jesus was smiling and was teasing

her and evoking from her some kind of faith which markers then been happy to record in that chapter. And of course at the end for Mark for Matthew as well, the centurion at the foot of the cross, a hard bitten Roman soldier comes out with truly this man was the son of God, and Mark writing probably to a Roman audience knows exactly what he's saying.

Here is a good old fashioned Gentile, a hard man, a violent man, but he has seen Jesus dying on the cross and Mark has written the gospel in such a way that this confession of faith by the centurion echoes all the way back to the voice of God himself and Jesus baptism. So when we read the gospels and John of course other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and there will be one fold and one shepherd on flocking one shepherd. Throughout the gospels, we see what then Paul and the others are implementing in the life of the church.

All of us are summoned to find our identity are ultimate identity, not in being a bit of this a bit of that certainly not in terms of skin pigmentation or any such thing, but rather that we are in Christ, we are new creations, because we have died within Paul says in Galatians two, and Paul as a zealous Jew is saying this, I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I've come out from under that old identity, and I've been given the new identity. I am crucified with the Messiah.

Nevertheless, I'm alive, but it isn't me. It's the Messiah who lives in me. And as he says a chapter later in this Messiah, there is neither Jew nor Greek slave nor free no male and female.

You are all one in Messiah Jesus. My brothers and sisters, why did we not think like this for so long. That's part of the question we'll be addressing in the second half.

Thank you. Thank you so much. Isa and Tom really, really grateful to hear your thoughts and your heart on the on these issues.

Feel free to yeah, Tom and in East side, just to yes, yes, yes. This is not like a correction or thing we just like one thing that's always important as a part of clarification, especially as relates to the context here North America. The term black issues because the complexity of slavery in the United States.

It is not a reference to skin color at all. So, for example, when you have people who are African descent in the United Kingdom, they might say that I'm a Nigerian Brit or I'm you gone down or whatever. I don't have most African Americans to the sentence of the enslaved don't have like that family background and Sam Nigeria and I'm you gone down this black actually function in two ways in the United States, both as a description of skin color and actually ethnicity.

So the United States has this has particularly in the in the use of black or African American, both a skin color and ethnicity at the exact same time. And so when we use

the term black as relates to black Americans, we actually we're talking to we talking not just about skin color, but basically what became African American culture that arose so black then functions both as a as a moniker for talking about like the black peoples of the world. And in an African American context, particularly for like a culture so for example, as relates to white in the United States, you can kind of go back behind that and say, we can deconstruct white and then say I'm German or I'm Irish, but you actually can't do that very easily.

As relates to African American, we have to find another way of referring to ourselves. And so it just makes this conversation a little bit tricky as we kind of move forward so that's just one translation thing coming from the United Kingdom over to the United States. That is a little bit different in the way that we talk about ourselves but beyond that there's nothing else that I would add.

So the reason I say that is because then black and in American context, because the manifestation of every child in nation because we effectively created a new ethnicity from the different ethnic groups that came into the United States that made up the kind of the the sinness of the enslaved. Yeah, thank you, you saw for that clarification. It also points out the reality that at any given time and place where cultures develop language to talk about who is who and where they come from.

It's always relative to the unique history of that people in place. And, but it's important for us to become aware of the ways that we artificially group humans together in these categories so we can at least know what we're talking about when we use these words like white or black. Thank you so I've got my eye on the question and answer stream.

And then also I've kind of got my own questions and I'm going to merge the merge this together. And then in your opening part of your what you shared, you're trying to give us this, the way the biblical authors thought about these words specifically justice and how justice, mercy generosity, but also sin on the inverse of it sin, involving all of these combined layers, the different cultures separate. And so I think one of the challenges then is actually even hearing what the Bible or Jesus is trying to say to us, because we co op their language into our categories.

And maybe what are some of the ways and this would be true, a question for you to Tom what are the ways that as we have conversations about this in our church communities in our ministries that we can name that important difference and how can we rebuild our internal goals and how can we do what these words and concepts mean that are not captive to our cultural debates. And if anyone is taking biblical studies, right, and you've done a word study if you're not, you can here's how you do a word study. What you understand it's this thing called illegitimate totality transfer and that's the idea that every possible meaning of a word can't be downloaded into every use of that word so you can't like look for all of the uses of the word love and then download that into every

use of the word.

The other thing that you learn when you learn about biblical studies is that different authors have different shades of meaning. So like what Paul may have in mind when he uses the word maybe different than what James has in mind when he uses the word. So responsible biblical interpretation means understanding a word in the context of the worldview of the particular writer.

Now we understand this as a general idea of how both biblical language work and how discourse works like words aren't these like kind of closed ideas they fit within the context of the world view. One of the things that I see happening is that when we leave when Christians have a dialogue, they kind of get rid of that rule. So in other words, when I say justice.

The only way to understand what I mean by that phrase is to look at how I spoke and how my general worldview how I talk about the world and my Christian values. And so when I say justice you must assume as a matter of course that these are the things that I have in mind. You can't just grab something that a secular person talks about justice says and says he saw you defend this.

The other thing is, we've lost the ability to understand one another, and we think that words activate worldviews that even then take these worldviews and enter the gospel. So instead we don't have conversations with one another. We have conversations with ideologies.

And so what is really necessary is actually this sounds weird sounds very simple, but for Christian to actually listen to one another and assume that you talk to the person in front of you, not some book that you read about the subject of what someone said on Fox News. Right. And so the amount of time that I've been saying to people, that's not what I mean when they will say explain yourself and I go, I wrote a whole book.

Here's 15 articles. And so, and we'll get to in the next session. There's an entire black Christian tradition of talking about these things.

And the first thing that we need to do is take seriously the idea to individuals mean what they mean in the context of a worldview in the context of a particular thing so in other words, I can't just pull out this the Romans world right. I can't just pull out this one version Paul, instead of understanding how a Paul says this part of Romans, officials in a larger floor of the argument. So actually, if we would actually apply biblical hermeneutics to understanding how communication works that I think they would actually make a lot of progress in society but instead, what we do is, we think that a word activation entire worldview, a legitimate totality transfer that allows us to avoid engaging with the topic at all.

And I think that's just that slander and bearing false witnesses actually a saying if you want to talk about it. Just a brief comment and actually I so enjoy Esau's exposition there that I'd forgotten what the original question was, was about justice, Tim. Yeah, particularly about how modern audiences read these words.

Yeah, we co-op them into our modern categories. That's right. And I have observed over the course of my lifetime, particularly over the last 20, 30 years with the rise of the internet and social media that people think in slogans.

And they don't want to be juggled out of the meanings that they have for those slogans. And I run into this the whole time. It's also partly a transatlantic thing that people in the UK don't use all the words they use in exactly the same sense as Americans do.

One of the BBC's Washington correspondence wrote a book recently about Americans. The title of the book was, if only they didn't speak English. In other words, the fact that you guys speak something which we both call English, masks the fact that we often don't mean quite the same by things.

We have different cultural expectations. This is really difficult because the English speaking people tend not to bother about other languages too much. So we assume that words only mean the one thing that we think they mean.

Anyway, this is a general postmodern problem. It's a general social media problem. And as Christians, we ought to be scrupulous about what exactly people are meaning in the Bible and in our own discourse.

Anyway, that's the general point. Isa, you made a comment that Tom, you actually kind of flagged and it caught my attention to about cultures and you had your finger on American culture, where there are forces that are denying racism that goes beyond the individual, the individual's estimation of another. There are large swaths of American society that find it hard to even see what a term like systemic racism refers to.

And you've called that a kind of over realized eschatology. I'm a theology nerd. I know what that phrase means, but that's a very meaningful insightful comment.

Could you unpack that? Yeah, you know, one of the things that is really important to do, and I'm just not going to be able to do it here, is to be as charitable as you can with people with whom you disagree. And you try to explain these things over and over again. But sometimes it's also important to expose things to make no theological sense from a Christian.

So we're going to talk as Christians here, right? So we don't believe over realized eschatology, the phrase means that the idea that the kingdom of God has been, has been in some sense realized more fully in our current existence than it is that the full transformation of the world is where white gods coming. And so oftentimes, opponent

proponents of people who talk about justice are accused of having an over realized eschatology. They say that we're trying to establish the kingdom of God on earth.

And so what I did is actually say something a little bit different. And this is what I mean when I say things make no theological sense. And we got to think this through is being rigorously like Christian about this.

Christians don't believe that people evolve out of sin that you born with the propensity to commit greed, like because your parents overcame greed, you're not born with it with that ability you're born with the propensity to commit those same sins again. So we don't believe in common evolutionary view of society, we believe that human beings can commit any sense that the human beings have ever done. And so we don't have this idea that any particular sin has been defeated like a race from human existence.

So, greed, like every society is born with the propensity to like be greedy or lust these things exist in the world. And these things affect the way society functions. Christian don't deny this this is just like Christianity 101.

The only exception to that rule is racism. Christians believe some do effectively that we've evolved out of racism that for the most part racism is saying we've dealt with and it's mostly gone. And then where it does exist, it only exists through interpersonal like animus, but the only way to maintain that idea is to say that no one who is racist has social power.

Because if you have social power and you have a sin, you can kind of enforce that sin on the wider society so for example, if you're greedy, and you want to have power you can give some of your money to the lobbyists who then get laws in your advantage so we can see our greed attached to power at least the laws that is the man is poor people. So the theory has to be there that nobody in society is racist any place that has any social power. That's a strange idea that makes no theological sense.

The other option that you would have to say because the other than the Bible says about humans is that the spiritual forces in the world that what we have is not just individual evil, but spiritual powers that corrupt human beings. Well, the idea that spiritual powers would say you know what we used to use racism as a tool for dividing people, but we're going to switch tactics. Now, in the spiritual powers want use racism anymore also makes no theological sense.

So the evidence would suggest like the theological differences would suggest a there will be centers of social power. Who have the center of racism or there will be spiritual powers that then use racial racism as a way of dividing people. When you add to that, the testimony of actual people of color.

Black people, Asian people, Latino, Latino people, and they say I'm experiencing racism

in the Bible and our theology would expect it. The reasons for denying it seem to me to have to be ideological, not rooted in biblical text because the biblical text will lead you to believe that you would have a propensity towards this thing, not an elimination. And so even I'm sorry you've asked the question is going to take a little bit more time.

Racism is the only sin that we can be tired of. What I mean is no one says no church says I'm tired of telling husbands to be faithful to their wives. We've talked about faithfulness enough let's go on to something else.

I'm taught about no no like marital faithfulness is something that you fight for the entirety of your marriage from beginning to end. So racism just like these other things like adultery are things that don't go away, but they're part of an ongoing conversation. Imagine if a pastor had said I preach my typing sermon once five years ago in the issues resolved, or I preach my parenting sermon once five years ago in the issues resolved it's only the racial conversation.

We preach once or in the context of tragedy. They're gets in the news cycle and then it goes away instead of seeing it as an ongoing part of Christian discipleship as a sin that exists amongst other sense. So thank you for your clarity and your candor.

And I say that and when you say when you say stuff like this, they you get called everything but a child of God. And so forgive me if I've lost some of the patience and the whimsiveness that you have to be able to have to tell the truth, but at a certain point you got to ask yourselves. And really what is the conversation we're having in America and the conversation we have in America makes no sense and Tom won't want to say this but I'll say it.

I did my PhD in the United Kingdom. The British evangelicals don't do this. You can look at John Stop in the Louisiana conference and look at British evangelicalism and see that in the UK the UK is not perfect like there's no utopia.

You can find of Christian faithfulness fidelity to the scriptures and suspicion of social action is uniquely American phenomenon. Because if you don't want to talk about the UK because you're mad at the Brits, you can run over to the global south and watch the people in the global south who are evangelicals will also talking about these issues. It's an American problem right over the Brazil and see the exact same thing.

It is a unique American heresy that we need to deal with. This footnote to that thank you, he saw it's great. It's a fascinating thing as I come and go between Britain and America that many, many British evangelicals politically speaking tend to be left of center.

I don't really like the left right polarization but that's a loose way of putting it. I'm very surprised when we come to America and find that it ain't necessarily so there to say the least. And so we have to be very careful about again about the labels.

There's another case of what he saw saying before, but in terms of which words mean which things in different contexts. I have a question it's inspired by one that was in the question feed and it's something that I thought of to Tom as you were doing your quick survey of appalling theology of the unity of the family of the Messiah. And also you saw this is a point raised in your book that was really helpful for me it's about it all comes together in Galatians three 28 in the Messiah no male or female slave or three.

And so I'm going to go ahead and sit at the end of the time. So Joshua's asking, how do you see Paul addressing power imbalances in the church between Jews and Gentiles. He acknowledges that in the new humanity there is no division between those categories Jew and Gentile male and female.

And so you saw that in the past you saw the cultural historical differences and imbalances. So, you saw you had a point about you just you called it the color blind reading of Galatians three 28 as a way of misreading what Paul is doing. And then Tom you've written a lot on Paul's vision and explored a lot of the multi ethnic family of God how is it both a vision of unity.

But that doesn't erase or become blind to cultural differences. Yeah, that's it's a really important point because for me as an elderly white male, I am very much aware because good friends have pointed to me and said, beware of this one that when I say there is neither the general Greek statement or female female, it can sound to some people as though I'm saying, you can all now be honorary white males. And of course, that is absurd, but sadly that is how many people from my tradition and similar ones have seen it that we will now allow you to join our club as it were.

We however don't have to change, and it's something that white males in our context I'll say more about whiteness in the second half, have to learn that we all have to die. This is what baptism is about is about dying to one's own identity. However, then in the New Testament, Paul says, yeah, nevertheless, I am still alive.

And in Romans 11, he says, I am a Jew, I'm a descendant of Abraham etc etc. So he hasn't been erased as a Jew, and that word erasure or raised has all sorts of connotations in our present context of course. However, the primary identification is in Christ, and as soon as any other identity that we might want to say I have this or I am that challenges what it means to be died and risen again with the Messiah.

Then we're in serious trouble. There are major issues down that line, but we've got to get that balance right. And we cannot then say, oh, if you say there is neither journal Greek you're you're erasing me.

That's a kind of typical postmodern reaction. And this is where we need very careful thought and wise and prayerful thoughts and humble thoughts. And I say to myself as much as to anyone else.

I would say one of the things once again is, and this is what we talked about sometimes you have to talk about things that make theological sense of things you don't. We never say, well, there's one version of biblical scholarship that we want addressed right now because this is not this conversation. But no one says I don't see gender because of the male and our female and the first part of it.

That's not the part of the conversation. Because we recognize that Paul recognizes the men and women existence categories of human existence. Now what is the question then that Paul is actually dealing with.

Paul is dealing with the question of as relates to the question of justification, does something give you more standing before God. So as it relates to what gets you more and more like more or less credit, you being a male the femur doesn't give you a higher place in the hierarchy as it relates to the Christian family. You being a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised doesn't matter.

And so what we're talking about here then is what Paul is talking about when you're making an argument about our essential work before God. One of the interesting things to get twisted around though is that when African Americans then began to say, okay, not me being black makes me better than white Christians. For me being black is part of what God created and it is good, then you're actually using Galatians incorrectly Paul never intended Galatians to function to step on affirmation of diversity.

He uses a step on affirmation of a hierarchy of value. And so if I say that like being African American is good and being British is good and being Ugandan is good, then I'm not in violation of Galatians 3:28. And so I do think that there is a form of nationalism that runs that can manifest itself in any tradition in which Galatians 3:28 can kind of manifest itself.

And a good example of that would be American exceptionalism, right, the idea is something American that makes us, you know, amazing and whatever. And so what I want to say then is that the what is often used for Paul and the reason Paul did this, it's an important part. The reason Paul did this is because there will be a tendency to ascribe value to the higher portion on that hierarchy.

So in other words, a male male thought that he had more value than a female or Jew might thought he had a Jewish Christian thought he had a higher place in the Gentile Christian. And so what Paul is saying then is that no, no, no, we're actually equal. So then when there's an African American or person on ethnic minority who's contending for their standing with people of God.

And then it's being used to push down on that expression is literally the opposite of what Paul used Paul never intended for Galatians 3:28 to push back on the people who will proceed as the underclass or certain value before God. And so that's the reason why I

say that the colorblind reading of Galatians 3:28 is flawed because of the way that it functions in American rhetoric, because when it functions is when I started talking about racism, people were, I don't see race well that's not how Paul intended to this the function. Paul used it to say, in a world that sees these two things as being a hierarchy of different values, in Christ they're essentially the same.

And we'll get into it. We'll get into it if we had another time, which is a different question. And this is what Paul, this is what Thomas getting it, the tendency to collapse Jewish Christian into modern white Christian.

And the idea is that everyone's being included into whiteness, or I don't even like you to turn whiteness included into kind of the white European way of functioning in the world. Instead of struggling with the idea that the Jews, even though Paul is humbling them, has some real right to have pride because their culture actually came from God, it was a Torah. And so Paul's doing much more theological work in that context, and say to a Jewish Christian, no, no, no, we're equal, then in our context with Paul never imagined, time talked about this earlier, Paul never imagined that one Gentile culture, we think it was better than another Gentile culture that would be unthinkable.

He would say we're all the part of the Great Unwash before the coming of the Messiah. And so it is this idea that we subtly replace Paul's equalizing Jewish and non Jewish believers with equalizing different ethnicities with the Western European context, being the thing into which we all ascend, and that's not what's going on in the Jewish, which has of course been reinforced by a cultural perception in Western Europe in the 18th and 19th century, but we were the ones who had Christianity, and we're giving it to the rest of the world, rather than in the famous saying one beggar telling another beggar where you can find some food. And we'll maybe get to that sort of stuff later on.

I may actually need to transition to the break, but I kind of hold the cards for the moment so I'm going to have one more thing on the table real quick. In Ephesians 2, the Paulian vision of unity again that's such an important articulation of this theme in the New Testament, where Paul has the model for him is the story through Jesus of non Jews being integrated into the new humanity becoming co-heirs co-participants of the promise to Israel. And that model as an analog, how does what happened in the first century, and what Paul's articulating, how does that, sorry there's a leaf blower out my window so I don't know if y'all can hear it.

How does that model both help us identify certain things in our cultural context now, and how is that analog different. And so we need to clarify what that difference is, but still address the issues in our day. You really do because it's always risky to take something which has uniquely happened as a result of the gospel in the first century, and make it an example or generalize truth for everything else.

People do this endlessly with Acts 15. Oh look, Jew and Gentile, do you have to get

circumcised? And guess what, the people in Jerusalem are always cast as a conservatives and the people who are not always cast as the nice, good, free, loving liberals and then you can play that out in whichever situation you like in today's church. And that's bad exegesis.

Likewise, this is because of the uniqueness of Israel and the purposes of God from the call of Abraham, right through to the Messiah, and you can see Paul telling that story. This is not an example of something else of a general truth. This is the reality.

So when Paul then says we have now had the major transition which comes to Israel's Messiah, the encrucified and risen. It isn't that Israel ceases to matter. It's the Israel is summed up in the Messiah.

Now, that doesn't happen again. People sometimes talk about the European Reformation in the 16th century, as though that was a great moment when suddenly everything changed and the enlightenment saw itself in the same way in the 18th century. Everything that went before is now old how to weave now got the new thing, which is a way of sort of running the Christian narrative about some aspect of modern culture that always ultimately self serving and idolatrous and we have been very careful of it.

But having said that, then there are spin-offs, there are ways in which we can very carefully and prayerfully play it out in terms of, okay, so if we have this situation, how might that apply? But it's always at a kind of a secondary, almost a figural reading of scripture, and we have to be very careful then when we build too much on what was a unique moment. I'll say one more thing to, sorry, this may be mutual affirmation, the reason why we did, I did my PhD with me. So, one of the things we should look at why Paul, how Paul does theology, this is actually important.

Paul could have said, you know, I mean, he probably, he wouldn't be probably, he did. He could have said all of this stuff that happened before, we just tossed in those things aside and then we do something new. But in places like Romans and Galatians, Paul is at pains to say, if the inclusion of the Gentiles is not a plan B, but it's a manifestation of God always intended to do.

So in other words, Paul is trying to say how Gentile inclusion within the people of God is a manifestation of God's eternal plan in places like Ephesians, he says it goes back from before God even created the world. And so one of the things that we can say then is that unity as a general rule of Jews and Gentiles and what our divisions are a manifestation of like a division, God always planned to create a family. And in that sense, you can say that like Ephesians applies because God wanted to create a family and there should be unity within the family, rather than saying the analogy is between Jews and Gentiles and African Americans, exactly for example, and white, and then you leave out the Asian community in the United States.

Now the last thing that I want to say, and this is really important. What does frustrate me is that when majority white churches want to give the diversity sermon, and they say we should go and be more diverse and then they use Ephesians chapter two, the rhetorical posture makes white Christians, the Jewish people to whom the Gentiles, the ethnic minorities have been included in. And so the idea is we need to go get the other people to come and join us.

And that's the rhetorical posture that Tom is trying to learn from is the idea that you can just make this analogy without being careful. And I would say the more helpful way to do it is to actually follow Paul's theological conclusion. Sometimes when you have a sermon and search and a text, you get into a problem.

But if you follow Paul's own logic is, hey Gentiles, you're not an innovation in God's plan, God always wanted to make one people in the Messiah. And so then if we have modern divisions, rooted in something other than the divisions that separated the people in the first century, the unity in the Messiah addresses those divisions without Ephesians to being about those divisions. And I think this is the thing we have to make.

And I do think that we should really take some time if you're going to preach Ephesians not to tell you how to preach it. But explain why the Jews would have reason for pride. Like these are Gentiles who are like off being read about Roman culture in the first century and compare it to what was going on in Judaism.

And you could see why instinctively the Jewish people think, no, like we've been being like we've been the people of God forever. Yeah, we got the Messiah. We know how to do this.

We've been doing it for generations and policy and no, no, no, no, no, no. And then there's a history of those are the bad guys. And Paul going, no, no, no, no, no, no, you don't get like it's coming like the story of the son who comes in later.

There is no like extra credit for being working in the field longer. And so this is what is going on in Ephesians. And it's only in that context that you begin to understand why parts do so much theological work to humble the Jewish Christians.

But there is no reason for that same kind of pride, at least as I understand it, and kind of what I call the, you know, the great Gentile Christianity where like we don't have these kind of culture hierarchies that would have existed different than the first century. Well, we'll continue to hear this conversation between Tom Wright and Esau McCauley next week as they respond to questions that came in from attendees of this special session on reading the Gospels while black. Thanks again to Together PDX for permission to broadcast it here on the podcast.

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See you next time.

[Music]

[buzzing]