

-- Speaker 0 00:00:11 Welcome to the thinking Christian podcast, your weekly guide to solid Christian thinking on culture, science, faith, and Christian confidence hosted by Tom Gilson. Tom is a senior editor with the stream stream.org. He runs the top ranked thinking Christian blog, and he's the author of several books, including the soon to be released too good to be false. How Jesus' incomparable character reveals his reality.

Speaker 1 00:00:44 Welcome to the thinking Christian podcast. I'm Tom Gilson it's independence day weekend. And I'm releasing this episode a couple of days early to Mark the day. It's a great time to talk about Jesus and freedom. Now this won't be about that perennial controversy over whether America's founders were Christians or whether they meant this to be a Christian nation. I think it's clear enough that in several key ways, America is a Christian nation, whether they meant it to be or not. Our founders lived in a world steeped in Christian influence. The political philosophy they read was deeply influenced by Christian views of ethics and the nature of being human. And that influence has everything to do with the freedoms they wrote into our nation's constitution. In that sense, we are a Christian nation. So let me talk about those two things. The Christian view of what it means to be human and also Christian ethics as they play out in politics.

Speaker 1 00:01:44 I'll do that. And then after that, I'll address two questions that will certainly arise. I'll speak to the question of why did it take so long? Why did it take so long for people to come up with the answer that our founders did? And why is it taking so long, still to work its way through our nation psyche? And I'll also speak to the question of why we've gotten it so wrong. Sometimes, including those who have claimed they were following biblical teachings. I'm speaking here, mostly the American South before the civil war and the painful followup to it. But let me start with where do our politics come from? What's the world. Do you have foundation? How did America come up with understanding that all persons are created equal and having certain unalienable rights? Well, our politics has everything to do with our view of what it means to be human Plato and Aristotle, both thought humans existed in different classes and that only some of us were meant to rule for Plato.

Speaker 1 00:02:45 There were slaves who were born to be slaves, merchants, born to be merchants, worriers, born to be warriors and philosophers born to be Kings. Now it makes a certain kind of sense, theoretically, that is it's a philosopher's goal or end in life to be wise to be a Sage. At least that's what Plato thought. And we do want to be governed wisely. Don't wait. Bye. Bye. Isn't it good to be governed by sages? Of course, there are several serious problems with his idea. One is that no one person, no one Sage could ever acquire enough wisdom to make a system and laws that would ensure every person's welfare, no philosopher lives only to acquire wisdom. That's Plato's ideal, but it takes no account of humans, desire for money, power, prestige, sex, and the other corrupting motives that we all know too well. I don't know how Plato miss that, but it isn't necessarily the case that we'd all want to be ruled by sages.

Speaker 1 00:03:47 Anyway, if it meant that we had no participation in government, humans want to have a say in their destinies, but worst of all by far is Plato's view that some people are by nature, born to be Kings and others by nature are born to be slaves. Now let's be clear when Plato says by nature, he means that a person who did something different would be violating his or her own nature and would be far less happy and fulfilled for it. A slave then is happiest being a slave because that's what he or she was meant to be. Well, that's obviously wrong for us today. Well, how did we get to the point where it was so obviously wrong? It wasn't through Aristotle, by the way, he was open to the idea of self rule, but the quote selves who could rule included only about 10 to 15% of the population, women slaves, they didn't possess the quote logos, the reasoning capacity to be in that group.

Speaker 1 00:04:51 He too saw them as inferior by nature, not capable of ruling. So where did we acquire this idea that all persons are equal and worth equal. Then in moral responsibility, it came from Jesus. Jesus --

-- came and established a completely new and different view of what it means to be human. And that was consistent. Certainly with old Testament thinking on creation, it was for shattered and the profits, but it was Jesus who brought it to full fruition. Good. His views on race racism. Now he never actually directly taught on that. He just demonstrated his teachings. He was totally anti-racist look what he said in his first public sermon. It's in Luke's gospel in chapter four, starting in verse 16. And I'll let you read the part where he stands up and reach the scripture. That's so messianic. And so justice-oriented from Isaiah about the year of the Lord's favor.

Speaker 1 00:05:57 And I'll let you read the part where the people of Nazareth pretty much respond like hi, he's one of ours. He's our guy. He's our hometown boy. But he addressed that. He picks out two examples from the old Testament of Gentiles, the despised, the people against whom the Jews had a definite racist attitude. He's picked them out and said, God intends to bless them. And how did they react? They were, they'd been talking about how much of a home guy he was. And they were speaking well of him before, but now they were filled with wrath. They Rose up and thrust them out of the city. They led him to the brow of the Hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down over the cliff. They didn't use a noose, but they were going to Lynch him for that. He said no to their racism in John four, when he speaks to the woman at the well and ministers to her, this is also one of many instances in which he elevated women's status and look at his parable of the good Samaritan.

Speaker 1 00:07:01 The Samaritans were half breeds. Jews really just buys them. And he made the Samaritan. The hero of that parable look to it as commissions to his disciples in Matthew 28, the end of the last three verses of the book of Matthew. When he says to make disciples of all nations, look in acts one eight. When he says you will be my witnesses. When the Holy spirit has given you power first to Jerusalem and Judea and Sumeria and all parts of the earth, Jesus was for all nations, all peoples. He was the Supreme anti racist Jesus viewed humans as equal, not equal in our capacities, not equal in our roles even but equal in worth in value and being loved by God equal to, I would suggest in our moral responsibility. Now this flows naturally out of what we learned at creation, which says that we're all equally created in God's image.

Speaker 1 00:08:05 It follows two from Jesus sacrifice for us on the cross, which every person needs equally and in like manner in order to be forgiven of our sins and to enter into her relationship with God, Plato, Aristotle, they never viewed humans this way. Neither has any other great civilization on earth. No other civilization has viewed humans as equal, except for those that have been influenced by Jesus. It certainly doesn't flow out of today's other dominant view of humanity that we arose from animals by way of Darwinian evolution. By which of course, I also include Darwinism intellectual descendants, especially Neo Darwinian evolution. The problem with Darwinism and his descendants. Instead, it's not so much a theory of species, but more a theory of populations. In other words, you have, as you apply it to humans, it wouldn't be about the human species. It would be about human populations.

Speaker 1 00:09:05 And that's true for all organisms, various populations of organisms compete for ascendancy. Even within the same species, evolution happens. That is a new population breaks off and becomes a foundation. The basis for what's going to become a new species. Evolution happens when one population seriously outperforms another in their reproduction and their survival. This is a population thing, not a species thing. And for Darwin himself and for many of his scientific followers in the first 50 to 60 years, especially the African population was way behind the Asians. And the Asians were well behind the Europeans. They were not equal. They were different populations, different places in the struggle for survival and just not equal Darwinian theory very specifically does not then imply equality among the races. It's not there in a theory. And if you really want to see someone go far with it, look at Ernst Haeckel H a E C K E L.

Speaker 1 00:10:16 Look up his theory. Other races Darwin's theory do --

-- es not get us here. Plato, didn't get us here. Aristotle, didn't get us here. You don't find it in Buddhism. I mean, you look at India and it's Hinduism. You got the caste system, but Jesus teaches. And the Bible teaches that we are equal in worth. We are equal in moral responsibility. The apostle Paul seems to strongly in Galatians three 28. When he says, there's neither Jew nor Greek male, nor female slave Scythian free, but all are one in Christ. Jesus. In other words, we all have equal standing before Jesus. This is the source of Jefferson's incredible statement that all are created equal from that one conviction flows, everything else, including the principle of one man, one vote and especially the idea that we're all endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights, unalienable here means that can't be taken away from us because these rights aren't something that's been given to us.

Speaker 1 00:11:24 They're inherent in us. They're, they're essential to who and what we are. We have these rights naturally being humans created by God, equal with each other in, in worth and in moral responsibility. So this is where and nowhere else. This is where that came from expressed originally in our declaration of independence. And later on in our bill of rights. Now, Jesus also, he had a very realistic view of human nature and we turned to Mark and some of what he said there in Mark chapter 10, verses 41 to 45. And this specifically has to do with government. It started with a jealousy thing among the disciples about who is going to be more important than the other and James and John wanted it to be more important when the other 10 heard it, it says in Mark 10 41, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John, but Jesus called them to himself and said to them, you know, that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles, lorded over them and their great ones, exercise authority over them, but it shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.

Speaker 1 00:12:45 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all for even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many service humility giving. Do you know how these ethics played out in the founding of America? Take George Washington's humility. For example, they wanted to make him King. He refused. He took the role of serving a public servant. As Jesus had taught, he took a humble role president when he could have been King sharing power with the other branches of government when he didn't necessarily have to. And this is, this is unique. Compare that with other philosophies before and since then other virtues, we see humility and service now as virtues that wasn't. So before it uses Aristotle, for example, had 13 virtues, which by the way, is one more than you'll find listed in the boy scout law.

Speaker 1 00:13:50 Nowhere on that list, you find either humility or servanthood today, though, when you hear someone accepting an award, even they'll say they're humbled by it. Obviously intending that to seem like a virtuous thing, a good thing. Jesus humility certainly expressed itself in our country's earliest days and expresses itself in our constitution. No one has total power Jesus' ethic beyond that is bound tightly to his view of what it means to be human. So just one more thing I want to add to it. His teachings on love as he expressed it in the golden rule, but also in John 13 34 35, or he says the new commandment I give you that you love one another by this all will know that you are my disciples. If you have love for one another, he said in the sermon on the Mount to love even your enemies, the golden rule is expressed in our founding fathers, insistence that every person have an equal opportunity to in government love for, for enemies.

Speaker 1 00:14:55 That's expressed, I say in our peaceful transfers of power. Now there's one more thing about Jesus' view of humanity that I need to bring into, which is his. As I said earlier, he viewed us. He knew us as being flawed. He knew what was in our hearts. He knew that we had a sin nature. It's not that we're totally awful. It's just that everything we do is tinged with our self centeredness, well, the founder's name. And they knew that this, this comes out very badly. When you give people power. Lord Acton said it very well. Although later he said power tends to co --

-- rrupt and absolute power corrupts. Absolutely great. Men are almost always bad, man. That's that sin nature working its way out, unfortunately in us. So what do we do with that? The founders were wise. They didn't give anyone absolute power. They divided the power up the separation of powers and checks and balances to keep anyone from having that kind of power. Speaker 1 00:15:57 This too is based on a Christian view of what it means to be human. That we've got this tendency to go bad. When we get power, our constitution really is built on a Christian foundation. So Jesus way was crucial to the founding of our country, whether the founders were Christian or not, we were built upon a biblical foundation, but this raises questions. If this is what the Bible teaches, why did it take more than 1700 years for anyone to form it into an actual nation and above all? How could it have taken even so much longer yet for our own country to treat blacks and women as fully human, fully equal in worth and in moral responsibility? I think the key to the answer lies in the fact that the change Jesus makes is always from the inside out. He changed individual's lives everywhere. He went political structures though.

Speaker 1 00:16:58 He left them absolutely untouched economic structures, the same, the same, and goes even for religious structures, except he did found the church. A whole new living structure meant to express his continuing presence on earth. Jesus was wise to do so. Of course he was the problem. Humans have is a problem of the heart. The only lasting change is heart level change. And the problem it's always on the inside. It always flows from the inside, from our propensity to self centeredness, pride, domination, even overall others and all the rest. The problem is resonant there and all our other problems flow from there. Changing societal structures, won't change the heart. Won't do it. Not in a million years. Structures are not inconsequential. They have their effect. They can certainly make person's lives better or worse, but changing our structures won't cure our ethical flaws just to be the other way around.

Speaker 1 00:18:03 It has to happen from the inside out this, by the way is my major concern with the black lives matter movement. The organization black lives matter. It's trying to change human hearts forcibly from the outside in, by altering human structures. That's just not how it works as Christ has demonstrated. Meanwhile, even though it's unquestionably true that black lives matter, the movement that bears that title is severely flawed and dangerous at its own heart. It's founder's support socialism abortion and the destruction of the family structure. Just read the about page on the black lives matter website, read about the founders. They say it it's clear enough, no movement with a flawed heart like that could possibly succeed in expressing itself in full goodness in virtue black lives matter. Yeah, no doubt about it. I support the saying, but I'm alarmed by the movement that bears that name.

Speaker 1 00:19:05 But I was talking about why it took so long for Christian ethics to be reflected in human structures. Well it's because inside out processes are slow processes. You start at the heart, the hardest hidden, no one even sees its transformation until the person displays it through his or her behavior. That's a growth process, which means even that individuals behavior change doesn't happen instantly. They don't mature immediately. It takes time for inward change to appear in outward life. And if that's true for an individual, how much more is it true for a whole society? Society's gone a lot more inertia to overcome than individuals. They've got a lot more structures and practices to overturn, including such as slavery societies, hook cultures, don't practice a new ethic on a structural level until someone comes along, first of all, and recognizes how they can do so on a structural level.

Speaker 1 00:20:10 For example, no one even heard of a democratic Republic until relatively late in the Christian era. We're talking the time when America was founded, Greek democracies, by the way, were nothing like ours. As I think I've already discussed. It takes time to change, time to mature as a society time to recognize the full implications of God's ethic for us time to overcome self centered ways in self centered structures that are blocking change time to rework

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-- systems, time to rework economies. That's why it took a long time. But time well spent in this back to our nation's founding though, our founders were wise enough to create a great system of government. It was a great step forward, but they weren't perfect. They were very, very much on the right track. They were on the right trajectory, but they hadn't yet reached the right destination. Give them credit for being on the right road.

Speaker 1 00:21:12 My goodness. Great. That was no one else was ever there before them, even though they didn't reach the final goal, they were doing a fairy. Very good thing. But what about their biggest failure? The one most abject failure ever seen as far as I'm concerned in any so-called Christian society, a one supposedly following the Bible and yet horrifically using abusing fellow human beings. Of course, I'm talking about Southern chattel slavery. It's an almost on bearable stain on Christian history and witness. And I read how some folks, quite a few sad to say, I read all, some folks use the Bible to justify it. And I cringe. I want to cry. I want to scream. It's awful. It's awful. But that, that doesn't mean that it contradicts anything that I've said here today. It doesn't, it didn't. Here's why, first of all, the people who said the Bible justify slavery were wrong.

Speaker 1 00:22:24 Simply that the Bible doesn't justify it. It's not in the Bible. The Bible allowed slavery for the time being in new Testament days because Jesus came to start a long, slow reformation, not an instant brutal revolution. And yet the new Testament commands masters to treat slaves as they would want to be treated themselves. That's the golden rule again, see Ephesians five, nine, two, and the whole book of Philemon. It says to treat your slaves well, does anybody thinks Southern slaveholders paid the slightest attention to that? They weren't justifying their kind of slavery through the Bible, not without ignoring major, major, crucial portions of scripture, by the way. And did you know this? The Bible specifically prohibits man stealing in first Timothy one 10, it says kidnapping in some versions, but as specifically pointing toward the practice of stealing human beings for the purpose of enslaving them, this is really clear.

Speaker 1 00:23:30 They were not following the Bible. They used the Bible, but they used it wrongly. And it's clear. It should have been easy to see how badly they were using it. They had every opportunity to know they were abusing it, violating it, disobeying it. And they went ahead. Anyway. Even claiming scripture was on their side. When any clear reading would show that it wasn't, how could they do that? Do that all too easily. I'm afraid the fault is always wasn't in God's word. It was in their hearts. It's a matter of heart. That's why Jesus came to deal with the heart. You see people will do what people will do. And sometimes that includes incredible evil and they'll justify it by any means at hand. And for these folks, that was the Bible portions of it taken out of context, misinterpreted. It has switched their guilty consciousness, but only because they twisted it to that purpose.

Speaker 1 00:24:41 So the Bible is the foundation of the good freedoms that we have through everything good that the American founders gave us. They didn't give us every possible good. They were still on the road there, they were on the right track. They were heading toward the right destination. They hadn't reached it yet. They felt very far short in recognizing the full equal humanness of Africans and African Americans slaves in other words, but the Bible was still clearly the foundation was America founded as a Christian nation in this podcast, just by way of wrapping up. I've decided to step out of the usual debate over whether the founders actually were Christians. I have my view on that by the way, but I wanted this to go in another different direction than that. So I've shown by way of Jesus' teaching and by comparing and contrasting it with other views of humanity and other ethical systems has shown that our system of government has been profoundly influenced by biblical thinking, right from the beginning, whatever else you might want to say about our founders, they crafted a government built definitely clearly upon Christian biblical principles and so same Christian principles that have guided us to the freedoms we've enjoyed since then, or for some of u --

-- s to the freedoms.

Speaker 1 00:26:09 We began to enjoy much later and which we're still growing toward, but those are the principles that are guiding us, have guided us and must continue to guide us. Let's not allow any movement, especially any contemporary revolution to throw us off that track. Let's keep on pursuing our freedoms based on those same foundational principles for the thinking Christian podcast. I'm Tom Gilson. Thank you for listening.

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Speaker 2 00:26:52 <inaudible>.

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