

*Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. Each week I visit with Wes McAdams, minister and author, and together we explore biblical passages and topics. I hope you enjoy part two of this study.*

ANDREW: What God cares about is your -- you know, your commitment to him, your pursuit of wisdom. And the early Christians used the word "virtue" a lot; they said "virtue," and that was the word that the Greeks used, you know, what's morally good in this life. And so that is what really -- that's the standard God uses.

WES: Yeah. And it's -- I mean, that quote just reflects so well, I think, the upside-down -- the upside-down perspective of the kingdom, that we have to perceive things different and how often we still -- you know, race aside, or maybe just race being one element of how we tend to look at the world through the wrong sort of lens so many times, that we tend to look at rich people or famous people or, you know, people that are successful -- and I put that in air quotes, "successful" -- by the world's standards and we look at them and we ascribe to them greatness, whereas Jesus would ascribe greatness to the poor in heart, the meek, the -- you know, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. And so Jesus would ascribe to these people greatness and would congratulate them and say, "Yours is the kingdom of heaven."

And so often we tend to fall into the same traps that the world falls into and still perceive people the way the world perceives people, based on the language that they speak or the place that they come from or the

color of their skin or how much money is in their bank account or how many Twitter followers they have, or whatever the case may be. We tend to perceive humans the way that the world perceives humans, and Jesus invites us to a different way of looking at our neighbor.

ANDREW: Right. And as you were talking there, I was reminded of when Jesus was -- made a point to that. So in regards to our family, we love our family, don't we? We do, and we should. You know, until we die, we love our family. But there was that time when someone came to Jesus and said, "Your mother and your brothers are standing out there and they want to speak to you," and of course they came to tell Jesus that he was crazy and they wanted him to stop. Jesus said, "Who are my mother and brothers? It's those who do the will of my father." So even Jesus did not honor his parents when they were -- or his mom and brothers when they were off the rails. He said, "No, these people inside this house listening to me are greater than my mother and brothers, because they are not on my team today." And he -- I mean, so Jesus' spiritual eyes puts devotion to God above family in that situation. Of course, Jesus is always going to love his family, but you see my point, that even with Jesus' eyes, he sees devotion to God as more important than your own family members, and that's extreme and that's amazing and it's a calling I believe we're all called to.

WES: Yeah. And wouldn't it be amazing -- and that's what's so incredibly heartbreaking about the history of the last 2,000 years, how often we have Christian people who were supposed to be perceiving each other as family were making war against each other, or enslaving

each other, or oppressing each other, or treating each other unjustly. People that were supposed to be family were preferring those that shared their skin color or those that shared their language or those that shared their nationality. They were preferring those people over the people that were supposed to be their family because Jesus was supposedly bringing them together, but they were rejecting the unity that's supposed to exist in Jesus and preferring the people that came from their same bloodline.

And if we embraced what Jesus is calling us to, what you just pointed out about him saying, "My family are the people that do the will of my father; that's my family. That's my mother; that's my brothers." And if we embrace that, then our family would be this multiethnic, multinational -- you know, all-over-the-world group of people, community of people. This is my family and I feel no less affection for them just because they don't speak my same language than I do for my son or my wife or my brother or my sister.

ANDREW: Right. Absolutely. You know, I was thinking about -- I have some -- there's some people I know that are -- who have become, I'll say, famous, you know, in religious circles because they, you know, were the son or daughter of another famous person. And I've always wondered about that and I always thought, "Wait. Why do they get special treatment?" And maybe they did, but the thing is, I think most of those people I know have in themselves produced amazing fruit and become amazing people and hard workers so they deserve the -- as Clement said, they deserve fame because they're doing acts of mercy. You know,

they're doing what God told them to do.

In that last quote from Lactantius he phrases something very familiar to me. So in that last quote he said, "God willed that all should be equal; that is, equally matched." And to me -- and others have noticed this, too, who have read this quote, that it sounds really familiar. I mean, for Lactantius to say "God willed that all should be equal," doesn't that sound like, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights"? Now, that was written by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. Abraham Lincoln repeated pretty much the same phrase at the beginning of the Gettysburg Address. And what I see is that Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, they believed these statements, and these statements really had already been made by Christians who were from the beginning, that -- as you said, 2,000 years. So Lactantius wrote this, you know, right at 1,700 years ago, and that's what Christians were saying back then.

WES: Yeah. You know, and it's interesting, too, and I think that -- I've often thought about what Paul says in Philippians chapter 2 about putting on the mind of Christ in that Jesus not only makes us equal -- and I totally agree with what Lactantius -- you're going to have to say his name. I'm sorry.

ANDREW: "Lactantius."

WES: "Lactantius." Obviously, I agree with that idea of equality and that human beings are equal in value, but what, to me, is a really amazing thought -- and I think the only way to actually live out this principle is to

put on the mind of Christ, and Paul says that looks like considering others as more significant than yourselves. And that, I think, is the only practical way to live this out, because I think what happens in practice, when we say, "Well, me and Andrew, we're equal" -- that when it comes down to a conflict, if we're equal, then I'm going to see myself as maybe slightly better than equal, you know, and I'm going to look out for my own rights above yours because, after all, you shouldn't get it if I don't, you know, and so I'm going to -- if both of us can't get what we want, then I should get what I want because, you know, it's me and so I'm going to look out for, as we say, quote-unquote, "No. 1." But the mind of Jesus is so upside down from what the way the carnal mind tends to think about things, and he calls us to consider others as more significant than ourselves.

And so if we were really striving for a community in which -- and I don't mean "community" as in the secular community; I mean the community of Jesus followers where we really, truly treat Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female as equal, then the only way to live that out is to consider others to be more significant than ourselves. And what if -- what if Christians really did that? I think that's why within Christian circles in the first couple of centuries it became obvious that you cannot maintain a slave/master relationship if you really put on the mind of Christ and why, as Christianity spread, and as real, true followers of Jesus took up the gospel and embraced the gospel and brought it into their hearts, why there were so many people that set their slaves free and even Christians that would go and would buy slaves

just to set them free because they wanted to live out this idea that human beings, regardless of where they come from or who they are, they matter to God, they're image-bearers of God, and that we need to be unified together under the banner of Jesus. And, man, if we really would embrace this truth, it changes everything.

ANDREW: Absolutely. I think that is really what it comes down to us -- our calling is to see others as greater than ourselves no matter who they are. Now, you know, when it comes to doing that, the first thing that comes to my mind is to make them greater than myself, then I'm going to lift them up; I'm going to encourage them; I'm going to promote them; I'm going to advertise them; I'm going to speak well of them, and that's all well and good.

Now, we don't have the power to elevate other people in like -- I guess, in a real solid sense. You know, we can't force someone to become greater than us because, you know, other people are not in our control. So here's another aspect of how to see someone greater than yourself. It's to do something that is in your control, and that is yourself. One way to make someone else greater is to bring yourself lower, to humble yourself and to bring yourself to their level. Not to -- you know, I don't mean that in a condescending way; I mean to bring yourself down so that you can sympathize with them, empathize with them, understand them. And whether it's social status, whether it's race, that's the key. It's "I want to understand you" and such.

So this next quote I have is also from Lactantius and he gives very practical ways that they bring equality among themselves. He says,

"Therefore, in lowliness of mind we are at equality, the free with slaves and the rich with the poor. Nevertheless, in the sight of God we are truly distinguished by virtue and everyone is more elevated in God's sight in proportion to this standard of justice, for it is justice for a man to put himself on a level with those of lower rank and he has made himself equal to his inferiors. Yet if he has conducted himself not only as an equal, but even as an inferior, he will plainly obtain a much higher rank in the dignity and judgment of God. For assuredly, since all things in this temporal life are frail and liable to decay, men tend to prefer themselves to others and fight for their place in life, but there is nothing more foul, nothing more arrogant, nothing more removed from the conduct of wise man, for these earthly things are altogether opposed to heavenly things, not to mention that these presently goods, to which great honor is paid, are actually contrary to virtue. Therefore, God has counseled us by placing this in particular among his divine commands, that he who exalts himself shall be humbled and that who humbles himself shall be exalted, and the wholesomeness of this command teaches that he who shall simply place himself on a level with other men and carry himself with humility is esteemed excellent and illustrious in the sight of God."

WES: Yeah, I love that. I love that quote. I love how he says "if he has conducted himself not only as an equal but even as an inferior he will plainly obtain a much higher rank of dignity in the judgment of God." And he says what we were talking about earlier "in this temporal life are frail and liable to decay, men tend to prefer themselves to others and fight about their place in life." Man, it is just so -- so obvious and clear

when we really listen to the gospel and how these men are reflecting what we see on every single page of the gospel -- every single page of the writings of Jesus and -- or the writings of the apostles about Jesus and his way of life and what it means to be a follower of Jesus, it's so obvious that there is nothing more contrary to the gospel than looking down on another human being.

ANDREW: Absolutely.

WES: There's nothing more contrary to the gospel than that.

ANDREW: Yes, because that's flesh. I mean, that's wicked flesh, to say I'm greater than you because of this.

WES: Yeah, for sure. The gospel is all about humbling -- as you said, humbling yourself. James 4, you know, it's all about humbling yourself, and the only way to be exalted and glorified by God with Jesus -- the only way to experience that exaltation that God wants to give us is to humble ourselves, and there is nothing that makes it more assured that we will not experience exaltation and glorification than if we exalt and glorify ourselves and look down on other people.

Yet how often this has been the case throughout the last 2,000 years by people that just -- what continues to just -- it just floors me when I think about the number of people -- I think about -- I'm a real big fan of Frederick Douglass' biographies and how he wrote about his experiences in slavery and how all of his slave holders -- or most of his slave holders -- his quote-unquote "masters" -- were people that considered themselves to be Christians. And he even experienced one master who was worse after he became a, quote, "Christian" than he was

before, and that floored Frederick Douglass to be able to think that anyone would claim to be a follower of Jesus and yet treat their fellow human being the way that these slave holders treated them. And then even from slavery till today, people that are blatantly racist -- not just, you know, subtly racist, but blatantly racist and who claim to be followers of Jesus, claim to be Christians, whether that's in this country or any country in the world, whether that's in this decade or era or any other era, it's always been wrong and it's always been contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

ANDREW: Absolutely. As I've seen, racism and any sort of prejudice is absolutely the opposite of the foundation of Christianity -- the foundation of it -- and to have that mind-set is fundamentally non-Christian. And as the early Christians pointed out, the reason that is is because of creation, that God created one man and we are all descendants of that one man, and I think it's wonderful that we, as Christians, can appeal to God our creator as the reason we are equal. And, you know, the world can't do that. You know, they can't appeal to creation. I just think that's a marvelous reason that we look at somebody and we say, "God created that person. That person is in the image of God. I must treat them well. No matter who they are, what they do, I treat them well because -- again, because they have the image of God."

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WES: Yeah. And that's something that only -- you know, one of the things that I think is a great apologetic for Christianity, one of the reasons I am a Christian, is because Christianity, above any other world view, ascribes to human beings -- every human being -- this type of value, the value of being image-bearers of God. Certainly, humanism or, you know, just natural selection or sort of agnosticism or atheism, it does not ascribe to human beings great value because human beings -- from a secular world view, human beings are just evolved pond scum, you know, and they have no real intrinsic value. There's no reason for their existence. There's no reason other than just survival. But a Christian world view says that every human being, regardless of nationality, regardless of heritage or ethnicity -- every human being, even your enemy, is an image-bearer of God and deserves to be treated as such.

ANDREW: Absolutely. You know, before I move on to my final quotation that I have here, again, speaking of seeing others greater than yourself, I just keep thinking that if we elevate others as we should -- you know, we should promote them; we should encourage others and say, "Hey, look" -- I mean, even Paul in I Corinthians talks about in the church those who aren't as much in the forefront deserve even more recognition because they're not in the forefront. That someone who's

up front of the congregation, they receive their recognition and that's well and good, but what about those behind the scenes? Paul says, "Don't forget about them." And in the same way -- so I'm saying that we should encourage and promote our fellow brothers and such like that, but again, if we elevate them, then we're elevating them with the praise of men. And yes, it's well-grounded because they're doing great for the kingdom, but if we humble -- if humility is our goal and our purpose, then where does the exaltation come from? Where does the fame or the whatever come from? It comes from God. I mean, the beatitudes -- when I read the beatitudes, when it says, "Blessed are those who mourn," "Blessed are those who hunger," and then it gives a promise, saying "they will be filled" and so on, "they will be comforted," it's God who does that, exactly as we read in James. James said, "Whoever humbles himself, God will exalt," that it's God who does the real promotion. And if we just speak the words of, "Wow, that person's awesome because of this," and it just leaves it at that, that's good, but the true source of value comes from God, and that value comes from us humbling ourselves rather than promoting ourselves.

WES: Yeah.

ANDREW: So here's the final quotation I have from Lactantius, and here he kind of drives home the importance of being kind, that kindness is the attribute that we must have. If we feel like we have any sense of justice, any sense of piety, any sense of equality, we must have kindness. So here's what he says: "The first quality of justice is piety or religiousness. It is to be -- and that piety is being united with God. Now, the second

quality of justice is equity, or equality, with man. The former we call religion; the second we call mercy or kindness. And that is familiar with a just person and someone who worships God because this alone compromises the principle of common life." And when he says "common life," he means equality of mankind. "For God, who has not given wisdom to other animals, has made them more safe from attack from dangers by their natural defenses, but because God made mankind naked and defenseless in order that he might rather furnish him with wisdom, he gave mankind this feeling of kindness so that man should protect, love, and cherish his fellow man and both receive and give assistance against all dangers. Therefore, kindness is the greatest bond of human society, and he who has broken this is to be considered impious and a murderer of family. For if we all derive our origin from one man whom God created, we are plainly of one blood. Therefore, it must be considered that the greatest wickedness is to hate a man even if that man is guilty, on which account God has commanded that hostilities are never to be opposed by us, but that they are always to be removed so that we soothe those who are our enemies by reminding them of their relationship with us. Likewise, if we are all inspired and animated by one God, what else are we than brothers? Indeed, the more closely we are united -- because we are united in soul rather than body -- on account of all this, that is our relationship of brotherhood, God teaches us never to do evil but always good, and he instructs us in what is doing good. It is giving aid to those who are oppressed and in difficulty and in bestowing food on those who are destitute. Because God is kind, he

wishes us to be a social animal; therefore, we ought to think of ourselves in the sense of other men. We do not deserve to be set free from our dangers if we do not set others free, and we do not deserve assistance if we refuse to give assistance."

WES: Wow. That's a great quote.

ANDREW: And I love that particularly because it gives me -- it really excites me because it's really powerful, but it gives me a calling. It tells me kindness is an action. It needs to be doing good; it needs to be setting the free oppressed. You know, when Jesus spoke his prophesy about himself in Luke chapter 4 about setting the free oppressed, the blind receiving their sight and picking up the brokenhearted and such, that is our calling, too, is to find those who are in dire straits. It's to find those who are oppressed, whether it be from racism, social injustice, sexism, xenophobia, all the things. Find people who are receiving the blunt of discrimination and we can go to their aid.

And, to me, the calling of kindness is not just doing good acts; it's letting -- having good be done. Kindness is very proactive. Kindness isn't just, "Hey, I'll treat you well." It's, "I'm going to be proactive in giving you something, showing you something, helping you with something." And, again, I think of this and I think, yeah, I would want someone to help me if I was in trouble, so I'm going to go to someone else's aid, and that, to me, is fulfilling the law of Christ.

WES: Yeah. And it's amazing how from the -- from every page -- again, every page of the New Testament how there's testimony to this idea that loving each other, loving our neighbor is -- has to be more than just

words. It has to be deeds. It has to be actions. It has to be -- I love the way the quote you just read says "he instructs us in what is -- in what is doing good, in giving aid to those who are oppressed and in difficulty and in bestowing food on those who are destitute. Because God is kind, he wishes us to be a social animal."

I mean, it's so obvious to me that these Christians who lived, you know, 1500 years before the time of slavery in the United States, how they got it. Because, again, it's at the very heart of the gospel to love not just in word, but in deed and in truth, in giving food, in lifting up the oppressed, in helping our neighbor because they are -- as he said, we are one blood. They're family, the human family, and helping each other and blessing each other. And so, you know, when I think about slavery or I think about the era of Jim Crow laws in this country, sometimes someone will say to me -- you know, I'll be talking about Frederick Douglass or I'll be talking about slavery or I'll be talking about people who claimed to be followers of Jesus and did this or did that, and people will say, "Well, Wes, you know, you can't judge people that lived in the 1800s or the 1700s or the 1950s -- you can't judge them by today's standard. Obviously, we look back retrospectively and we say, well, yeah, obviously, that was wrong, but they didn't know any better then and you can't judge them by today's standard." And I want to look at them and say, but here's a person that you were just reading from who lived 1500 years before that, or even the gospel itself. Even every apostle and every early Christian was writing about how wrong it was to mistreat or to look down upon or to enslave or to do harm to your fellow

man. It is wrong and it's contrary to the gospel, and they should have known better in the 1800s. They should have known better in the 1950s, and even today we should know better because the gospel spells it out on every page.

ANDREW: You're right. I mean, back in the 1800s -- I mean, I would think that it would be just as popular then as it is today, the Golden Rule, and if they had the Golden Rule back then, how did they take that? Well, I -- you know, yeah, I say that if they had the Golden Rule back then and it was as popular as it is today and they violated that Golden Rule, then yeah, they did have the same instructions from God that we do.

WES: Yeah.

ANDREW: So one of the things that I think the early Christians used as their anthem -- the one passage from scripture that they said this is -- this is our go-to place to remind us that mankind are created equal and we should treat people with kindness, and it's from Acts chapter 10:34. Now, in this passage -- you know, growing up I heard that Peter is in this situation and he's going to go visit Cornelius, and I've heard people say that, at this time, Peter was still an atheist -- whoa. Peter was still a racist and he didn't want to go see Cornelius and he was apprehensive. But as I really looked into this passage, I think Peter was very willing to go to Cornelius. Now, he didn't fully understand the significance of what was going on here, but he was very willing to do it.

He goes to Cornelius and he says, "You guys are different than me but I'm here to preach the gospel. I will do it." So Peter does the right thing. And then when the Spirit comes on them, Peter goes from the

knowledge of everybody's created equal to witnessing the truth that everybody's created equal, so it went from knowledge to experience for him. He saw God miraculously prove to him that mankind are created equal and now Peter experiences the equality. Okay. So Acts chapter 10:34. "Peter began to speak. In truth, I understand that God doesn't show favoritism, but in every nation the person who fears him and does righteousness is acceptable to him." To me, that's what it comes down to. Doesn't matter what nation you come from or race you come from, whatever social status you were born into, whatever gender you have, whatever it is. What matters is us being acceptable to God, and that comes from our love and our faith and our obedience to him, and that -- as Jesus said, that's righteous judgment. That is what really matters, because, you know, having standards that are worldly and carnal, we see the differences. Those should be differences but not standards. Our standards are heavenly. Our standards are based on righteousness, not based on earthly differences.

WES: Yeah. Yeah, thank you, Andrew. I mean, you're exactly right and, I mean, I appreciate so very much your perspective and bringing all of these quotes and us tying them into what scripture says and just encouraging each other and our brothers and sisters in Christ to do exactly this and to embrace this idea that God shows no partiality, that he accepts people of every nation. And, really, that has always been the heart of the gospel, is God bringing together people of every nation and tribe and tongue and uniting them with himself, but also uniting each other -- uniting us with each other, and it is just such a beautiful,

beautiful truth and a beautiful, beautiful dream that Jesus has for us that if we would all embrace, man, it would just change everything, and we have to adopt this way of thinking and this way of looking at each other and this way of treating each other.

ANDREW: Absolutely. Like as you said earlier, it's not about division; it's about unity. There was a very famous song a while back by DC Talk called "Colored People," and in that song he mentions that people are a kaleidoscope of colors, and I love that imagery because when I look in a kaleidoscope I want there to be every color. I want there to be a beautiful unity and collage of all these colors, and when you shine the light of God through that kaleidoscope, it brings out a majesty and a beauty that is altogether divine.

WES: Yes, absolutely. So well said. Our unity of diversity is a testimony to what Jesus has done for us. It is a testimony to the truth of the gospel because only Jesus can bring together people of every tribe and nation and language, and he is doing that if we will walk in step with the gospel, if we will walk by the spirit and not by the flesh.

And I appreciate so much not only you coming on the podcast today and sharing these thoughts with us, but also for the work that you're doing. So anybody that's listening, I would really encourage you to check out Andrew's YouTube channel at YouTube.com. I guess they can just type in "/postapostolic church." I won't say "apocalyptic."

ANDREW: I sometimes say that, too.

WES: So, yeah, I would definitely encourage you to check that out.

Andrew has so much knowledge that he's sharing with the world and,

really, I think we would all benefit from listening to and hearing the perspective of these early Christians because the issues that they dealt with are issues that we're still dealing with, and to hear their perspective and how the gospel shaped their thinking is beneficial to all of us. So thank you, Brother. I appreciate you.

ANDREW: Thank you for inviting me on, Brother, and I really appreciate it, and God bless you and God bless everyone who is striving to work kindness in this world.

*I hope that you enjoyed this conversation. Please join us next week for another podcast episode. I want to give a big thanks to the Church of Christ on McDermott Road, as well as to Travis Pauley, our editor, for making this podcast possible. We love you, God loves you, and we hope you have a wonderful day.*