

---

## **Race, Christianity, and the Slavery Debates**

In his second inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln pointed out that people on both sides of the Civil War “prayed to the same God” and “read the same Bible.” Given these commonalities, it would seem like these people would have been able to resolve the question of slavery without resorting to arms. They could not. In this episode, we will see that, for many white Protestant Americans especially, a shared commitment to the Bible and to a particular way of reading the Bible made the question of slavery even harder to resolve. We will also see how racist thinking permeated biblical interpretation among many white Americans and why other ways of reading the Bible, including those on offer from black Christians, exerted little influence as the country moved to war.

### **Key Questions:**

1. Why couldn't evangelical Protestants, particularly white evangelical Protestants, come together and resolve the issue of slavery without recourse to war?
2. Why did so many white Protestants believe slavery to be compatible with Christianity?

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What, in this episode, most surprised or challenged you?
2. How do you, your church, and/or your denomination interpret what the Bible says about slavery? (Some of the key passages include Exodus 1-2 & 12; Ephesians 6:1-9; Colossians 3:18- 4:1; Galatians 3: 26- and Philemon.)
3. What are the “common sense” messages that you receive about race? In other words, what have you been taught, explicitly or implicitly, to see as natural that might, in fact, be constructed or historically contextual?
4. Who do you read the Bible with? Are they people who could help you see where you might be reading your assumptions—particularly your racial assumptions—into the text? Why do you read with the people you do? Why don't you read with the people you don't?