

But when we simply talk about five acts of worship and we're following God's commands, we're restoring New Testament Christianity because we do it all right, it's like whoa, whoa, whoa. I'm all about restoring New Testament Christianity if by that we mean we're getting back to the heart of things, we're getting back to doing Bible things in Bible ways for Bible reasons.

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 this study.

WES: Okay, Travis. We are going to answer another e-mail that we've gotten, and I am so thankful that our listeners continue to send in e-mails and Facebook messages. We ought probably to say that they can also call in, and I would love to play a clip of a recording. If somebody wants to call in, they can call (707) 238-2216. So that's (707) 238-2216, and they can leave us a voicemail and we would love to play that on the podcast.

But we got an e-mail from Chelsea, and Chelsea asked about a follow-up from our discussion on instrumental music. So we had done a conversation where I walk through an old blog post that I had written. Part of it was to discuss instrumental music and sort of that side of things, particularly music in the Old Testament. That was part of the conversation. Part of it was just demonstrating the fact that we grow

and we change, and we change our mind on things and the way that we reason. We come to better conclusions. And so I wanted to demonstrate that and use myself as an example, that I disagreed with myself.

TRAVIS: But you made me say the part that you disagreed with.

WES: That's true. I needed somebody -- I needed somebody to play my alter ego -- my previous ego, and so, yeah, I appreciate you standing in for me.

TRAVIS: You got it. Anytime.

WES: So we did that, and I got not only Chelsea's e-mail here, but also some other people that asked for similar things and asked for me to do a follow-up on that discussion, and because I mentioned several times during the podcast that although I -- my reasoning has changed on some things and I disagree with the way I went about some of my arguments in the past, I still believe in a cappella singing in worship. I believe that the church should sing a cappella, which means -- for those that may not know what "a cappella" means, it means -- well, the connotation is that we don't use instruments; it's singing without the instrument. And so Chelsea just asked, "Would you mind doing a follow-up episode explaining why you believe we should sing a cappella in our services? Thank you for all you do through Radically Christian." And, yeah, Chelsea, I appreciate the e-mail and I would love to talk about that for just a little bit.

Let me start by saying that we tend to approach this from a very negative perspective. We tend to talk about why we're against instruments, but I love the way Chelsea asked the question. "Can you

talk about why you're in favor of a cappella singing?" That, I would love to talk about. I don't want to talk about why I'm against instruments, and the reason why -- and I think that's an important conversation in and of itself -- because scripture doesn't talk about being against them.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New Testament is there anything negative said about the use of instruments, per se. There's a couple of passages in the prophets where they were using instruments and God was talking about the way that they were allowing injustice to happen and were continuing to offer up music to him, and he wasn't listening to their music because of their injustice. It didn't really have anything to do with the instruments; it had to do with their lack of justice. It had to do with their lack of obedience. And so there's really nothing contextually that is negative about instruments, so I think that if we spend a lot of time talking about why it's wrong and why we shouldn't and why we're against it, I think that we're going beyond what is written, and I think we have to be very careful there. That's not to say that we can't have an opinion about those things, and I think that --

TRAVIS: Sure.

WES: And that doesn't mean our opinion is wrong. I think lots of people have reasonings and opinions. Paul, in Romans 14, calls those -- and the Greek word is "dialogismos." It's your reasonings, and we all have reasonings about things. It doesn't mean that our reasoning is wrong, but it does mean that we can't be dogmatic about it because this isn't something scripture explicitly teaches; it's just the way I've reasoned

through on this. And we all do have those types of reasonings, and those reasonings are good.

But I think where it's much healthier to have this conversation, rather than focusing on why I'm against instrumental music in the church, in the corporate collective singing and making music -- I think, rather than having the conversation negatively, I think it's much healthier to have and much more biblical to have it in a positive light. And the reason why -- I think that what I have often failed to recognize is the purpose of our singing, the purpose of our making music together.

So let me ask you, what do you think is -- not just your opinion, necessarily, although I'm open to that, obviously, but what do you think the average church member -- like, it's weird, right? I mean, in one sense, like the church is the only place where -- and I don't mean the church -- I just mean when we come together, when we assemble, the assembly is the only place, really, where that sort of thing happens. You don't, like, go to the office and start singing with your -- I mean, maybe some people do -- that, I don't know -- but, typically, probably, unless you're singing in the car or singing in the shower or you're going to a concert, or something like that, typically, you don't sing with a group of people --

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: -- throughout your week, so it is kind of a weird, different, unusual type of an event. And we don't often stop and ask ourselves, "Why are we doing this?"

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: "What are we accomplishing?" So what do you think -- what would be -- if you just asked the average churchgoer, "Why do we sing on Sunday? What's the purpose of our singing," what do you think -- what do you think most people would say? I don't know, but what do you think?

TRAVIS: The average churchgoer? I think they would probably say, you know, it's to worship God; it's to praise His name. It's to -- I think maybe the more insightful might say something like it's for us. It's for our own -- for uplifting each other and kind of -- I mean, there's an element of preaching, especially singing in the church of Christ, with -- especially the older songs that are really dense lyrically. There's like an element of preaching to it. You're kind of, in a different way than preaching or praying or reading scripture, you're reinforcing the message of Christ in song.

WES: Right. And I hope that would be -- I really hope that would be the answer. I think that's an incredibly insightful answer and I hope that would be the answer, or something along those lines.

I guess I grew up thinking -- I'm not saying that anybody specifically said this, although I'm pretty sure that I heard this in sermons and it was alluded to. It was the impression that I got. Maybe -- sometimes when I talk about my upbringing, maybe I ought to say, rather than this was explicitly taught, it's more the impression that I got. And I don't know where I got it or how I got it, but I got the impression that the purpose of singing was to fulfill a commandment.

TRAVIS: Right. Oh, that's interesting.

WES: And I guess that's how I grew up thinking about it. Why do we sing? Well, because we're commanded to. And I think that I would say -- I would have said that about everything we do in the assembly. Why do we do this? Because we're commanded to. We give because we're commanded to. We sing because we're commanded to. We take the Lord's Supper because we're commanded to. Well, I don't know. I mean, you know, I guess there might be some truth to that, but it's like I would want to explore with somebody, well, what do you mean by "commanded to"? And do you mean like you're compelled to do it? Like when we talk about "commanded to" do something -- I think sometimes we forget what Paul says, that God loves a cheerful giver, and he doesn't want -- and he's specifically talking about giving money, and we often do try to compel churchgoers, God wants you to give this and God's commanded us to set aside, you know.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: That's a whole 'nother podcast. We'll talk about giving, but we do try to compel people into giving. You know, you've been commanded to, so whether you want to or not, you have to. But Paul says, no, no, no. He says, God doesn't want you giving out of compulsion. He loves a cheerful giver. He wants you to give because you want to, because your heart has been transformed and changed, and that's why you're doing this.

So it's funny that we -- we try to compel worship from churchgoers. We try to -- or at least, again, that was the impression that I got, that I'm doing this because I'm commanded to do it. So I got this impression -- and I'm not saying -- again, I'm not saying everybody feels

this way. I don't know what everybody thinks, but I am saying I grew up believing that my job was to come here and do what I was told to do and check something off the list, and I felt like by -- specifically, by singing without instruments, by singing a cappella, I was fulfilling a command. I was doing what I was supposed to do so that -- and, again, I don't know that anybody ever said "so that I could go to heaven," but that seemed to be the general impression that I got, was that in order to be good enough to go to heaven, I had to do these five acts of worship the right ways, and by doing these five acts of worship in the right ways, I was being the real, true church of Jesus, and, you know -- and I was assuring myself of salvation.

I don't know that there could be anything further than the picture we get -- from the picture we get in scripture than that, and I'm very bothered by even giving anyone that impression. Again, whether or not anybody explicitly ever taught that or believed that -- I'm confident my parents didn't believe that -- but, again, that was the impression I got from the churches that I attended and prayers that were prayed and things that were said.

Sometimes we discount things that people say, even in prayers, from the pulpit. You know, when we're gathered together and somebody says, "We're here this morning because we've been commanded to," and we just give each other the impression that's why we're doing what we're doing.

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: And then even just to stop and think, are we commanded to? Like

are -- did Jesus or any of the apostles, like, command, in that sense, like God tells you to sing, so whether you want to or not, sing. Well, you know, James says -- James says, "Is anyone among you sick? Then call the elders and have them pray over you and anoint you with oil." You know, so is it a command?

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: Well, yeah, I guess that's a command to call the elders and have them pray over you, but like -- not like a command like check-something-off-a-list command; command like if you're in this situation, do this. And then he says, "Is anyone among you happy? Let him sing songs of praise." So is that a command? Well, yeah, but it's a conditional command. It's just saying, you know, if you're happy, then give thanks to God, but it's not like a command like, "Whether you want to or not, you come here on Sunday and you sing." It's not really like that. It's just saying if you've been changed, if you've been transformed, if you've been saved, if he's given you something great, then tell him thank you.

You know, and I actually -- you know, thinking about James' statement, "Is anyone among you happy? Let him sing," or, "Is anyone among you joyful? Let him sing," you know, sometimes I think we get that backwards when it comes to singing. I think we try to sing in order to be happy and we try to use -- and I'm not saying music or singing doesn't change our mood, because it can and it's powerful like that, but I don't think it's specifically intended to. I think that the way James, at least, puts it -- and we'll talk about what Paul says in a second -- but, you

know, he puts it in such a way as if you already are, then this is the correct response. If you're hurting, then pray. If you're happy, then sing, you know, so if this is what God has done for you, then sing.

And I think that we have to be very careful, I believe, that we don't use music, we don't use singing, we don't use worship in order to emotionally manipulate people or even to emotionally manipulate ourselves, because while, you know, there's something almost medicinal about music -- if I'm having a bad day, I can listen to a song and it helps, you know. It helps me, but it's very superficial if it's just about the music, you know. I mean, if I listen to Eye of the Tiger or the Rocky soundtrack when I'm working out, you know, it pumps me up but it doesn't change me or transform me.

TRAVIS: Right. It's temporary.

WES: Right, exactly. It's a temporary high. It's just a superficial thing. And I think we can very easily do that with our music and our singing, and I think we have to guard against that and we have to say, you know, our singing should be motivated by our emotions, by our love for God and our happiness and joy over what we have in the gospel rather than an attempt to manipulate even our own emotions in order to feel temporarily happy.

And I'm not saying that everyone who uses instruments is doing that at all. I'm not making that accusation. I don't care to even comment on anything, but I am saying that I think there is something -- I think there is something to that. And one of the reasons that I believe that the simplicity of a cappella singing is powerful is because it's less likely to be

used that way and it's more likely that we focus on the words and expressing praise together as a family to say God has saved us and we are happy about that and we are joyful about that. So there's part of it. So part of it, I think, the reason I believe in a cappella singing is that I believe that it should be to express gospel-transformed hearts rather than to manipulate hearts into being superficially happy.

But I think that there's more to it, and so I want to look at a couple passages. The first one -- and this is something we talked about before when we talked about the Spirit a couple episodes ago. But in Ephesians 5 -- so in Ephesians 5 there are several commands and contrasts, but what's interesting, especially if we're telling people, well, you're commanded to sing -- again, I don't know. The imperative in this passage, especially starting in verse 18 -- because we could go back to "Look carefully how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise" in verse 15, but we'll skip down to verse 18. So Ephesians 5:18 says, "Don't get drunk with wine, for that's debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." So there's the imperative, "be filled with the Spirit."

And, again, like we talked about when we talked about the Spirit and what does it mean to be led by or taught by the Spirit, you know, that's an interesting imperative, right? So we -- but we never talk about that. Like we don't ever say, well, we're commanded to be filled with the Spirit. We say, well, we're commanded to do these five acts of worship. We don't say, we're commanded to be filled with the Spirit because I don't know that we would even know, like, how do you go about accomplishing that? You know, what does it look like to be filled with

the Spirit?

And so Paul gives these -- I always forget the word -- adverbial participles. So Paul gives the imperative, "be filled with the Spirit," and then these adverbial participles that modify, that point back to the imperative, the command to be filled with the Spirit. So the command isn't sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. That's not the command; it's the adverbial participle. Now, it does work like a command in the same way -- and we used this as an example last time. If I say, "Go to the store," and then I say "leaving the room," "going out the door," "getting in the car," all of those sort of modifiers, they work as a command because I'm giving you instruction on how to accomplish that bigger one. But if you only focus on leaving the room and you don't focus on why --

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: -- then you could, like, pat yourself on the back for walking into the hall and just standing there. Well, that's not what I asked you to do. I asked you to leave the room, go through the door, with the bigger picture in mind that you're trying to accomplish going to the store. That's the imperative. That's the command.

The command here is to not be fools. The command here is to not live foolish lives. The command is not to be a drunkard. The command is to be filled by the Spirit so that you walk wisely in the world and so that you understand what's going on. And a lot of people have pointed out, and rightfully so, that Paul isn't specifically talking about the assembly here. He's really -- in context, he's talking about your whole

life. Like your whole life needs to be wise and Spirit-filled.

Now, I do think when he gets into these adverbial participles that tell you what it looks like or how to go about being filled with the Spirit, I think it's hard to carry those out if it's not in the assembly. Like how do you sing to one another in psalms and hymns if you're not assembled? I can't sing to you, and I'm probably not going to sing to you individually. I'm not going to come to your house and knock on the door and be like, Travis, I have this song in my heart that I want to share with you.

TRAVIS: That would be uncomfortable.

WES: Wouldn't it, though? And I don't think that's what Paul means. I think he means that for the church at Ephesus to live on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and Friday and Saturday -- to live Spirit-filled, wise lives, then part of that is to come together, and here's the adverbial participles that he gives. I'm going to stop saying "adverbial participles" right now. He says, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," so that's one. "Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart," that's two. "Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," that's three. "Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ," that's four.

So he gives these to say this is what it looks like. And so part of it is giving thanks; part of it is submitting -- mutual submission to one another; part of it is addressing one another, and how do we address one another? In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and singing to the Lord. So it's both singing to the Lord, but it's also addressing one

another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. For what purpose? Again, to be filled with the Holy Spirit. That's the purpose or that's -- you know, again, it's hard to know whether he means this is how to go about -- to accomplish it or what -- he could mean this is what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit. Either way, or both -- and I think it's probably fair to say it's both -- this is what it looks like to be Spirit-filled people. This is what you do. If you want to live a Spirit-filled life, part of that is to come together as a church family and address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

And so like going back to what you said in the very beginning, it's preaching, it's proclaiming the gospel, and if it's not that and if that's not the focus of it, then, arguably, can you accomplish what you're supposed to accomplish if you're not being intentional about it? So I think there has to be some intentionality here. And I think, again -- and this is a problem whether you use a piano or not, whether you use a rock band or not -- you have to know what it is that you're trying to accomplish here or what it is that you're trying to live out here, and what it is -- it has to be focused on being a people that are filled with the Spirit of God. And if you're just checking something off a list, like God told us to sing so we're singing, you know, and we're trying to make God happy by singing the way he told us to sing, that's not at all what Paul is talking about accomplishing.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: He's not saying in order to make God happy, you need to sing to him.

TRAVIS: You know, I thought while you were saying that, that this is, ultimately, a problem of how we approach God and how -- like when I was a kid, you know, and we talked about the commandments and don't take the Lord's name in vain, you know, everybody pretty much agrees that one holds up over time, from Old to New. And it was always just, "Well, don't use his name as an exclamation." And the longer I've thought about it and the more I've gone on, it's like I think that's, in part, how I approach him just all the time, just in my prayer, in my worship, and it's made me kind of pause before praying. It's like hold on. You know, what -- you almost kind of run down, what am I going to talk about? What am I going to come to him -- I'm not -- and not like, oh, I don't want to waste God's time. Not that. I know he's limitless and, yes, he could put up with a lot from me, and he has, but it's like, man, I want to approach his throne with respect and I don't want to utter his name in a prayer, I don't want to sing a song with my brothers and sisters, with the wrong mind-set and not in the right attitude, and, you know -- and that comes up -- talking about the Lord's Supper, it's like don't take the cup if you've got a problem with somebody. If your mind's elsewhere and you're focused on, you know, how your brother slighted you and it's like go make it right. Don't come before God until, you know -- until you kind of get your house in order, and...

WES: Well, and you make me think of another passage. When Jesus talks about the religious people of his day -- you used the word "vain" -- you know, taking God's name in vain, and I think there's lots of different ways that that could be applied. I mean, on the one hand, it could mean

swearing something in vain that you don't intend to make -- to follow through on, and you say, well, I swear to God, or I swear by God, or I swear by God's name, and you have no intention of doing that, you're doing that in vain.

But Jesus also talks about vain repetitions, and he says people that think that they're going to be heard because of their many words. And I think that you could be right. I've never really applied that to song, but it's interesting how maybe we think that we'll be heard because we sing it the right way, but we're just -- we're just singing empty words and words that -- if we don't stop and think about the words that we're singing and why we're singing them.

And so whatever -- you know, our focus has to be on these words and not just -- and you brought up exactly what Paul was talking about with the Lord's Supper and the church in Corinth in I Corinthians and how they had strife going on, but they're taking the Lord's Supper and it's actually making the strife worse rather than bringing them together. And if I'm not -- if I'm singing and I'm not thinking about you and addressing you -- and maybe not you, specifically, but all of my brothers and sisters that are there in the room with us, and I'm not thinking about them and thinking about how will this motivate and help and encourage them -- which actually brings up an interesting point, that a lot of our songs are very individualistic, and more and more so. You know, "Why did my Saviour come to earth?"

TRAVIS: "Why did my Saviour come" --

WES: Yeah, "Why did MY Savior?" Not OUR Saviour, but "Why did MY

Saviour?" "Because he loved" --

TRAVIS: Me.

WES: -- "me so." Right. He didn't love all of us; he loved me, you know. And a lot of our songs have to do with Jesus loves me. I mean, that's one of the first ones we teach to our kids, *Jesus Loves Me*. And that's not wrong; it's right. And Paul boasted and was proud of the fact that Jesus loved him, a sinner, and Jesus saved him. And so, yes, there is an individual aspect of that. That's fine and that's good. But when we come together as a family, even if I am singing, "Why did my Saviour come to earth? Because he loved me so," I need to be listening to all of my brothers and sisters as we sing this together. He loved me as in "we," because we're all singing it together. He loved us so.

But, again, we make Christianity -- we make worship very individualistic. It's like I'm coming here, the place I'm supposed to be, following the commands so that I can make God happy because I did what I was supposed to and I'm checking this off a list, and then I'm singing songs about how God loves me individually and God cares about me and Jesus died for me, and then I go home feeling better about myself and my relationship with God, when Paul says part of what you're doing in this assembly is you are addressing one another. You're talking to each other. You're saying, this is who we are. This is who our Saviour is. This is what he's done for us. This is where we're headed. This is what our hope is, and I think we lose that so very often.

But, again, the question, going back to it, why do I believe in a cappella singing? Because a cappella singing puts a focus on the words.

Now, I'm not saying that it always does because, again, like I'm trying to point out, is even with a cappella singing you can definitely not focus on the words. You can have vain repetition where you're just thinking, well, I showed up and I did what I was supposed to. That aside, I think it's easier, with a cappella singing, to focus on the words than it would be if we added other things that complicate the music and complicate what we're doing and there's more of a possibility on focusing on other things. But we have to be so incredibly intentional about not only praising God, thinking about God, but also addressing one another, and then, again, back to the larger commandment of that passage, being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Why am I coming here? Why am I assembling? Why am I singing? So that I can encourage Travis and so that I can encourage Bob and Fred and Mary and Susie, and I can encourage these people and be encouraged by them so that I can proclaim the good news of Jesus to them and they can proclaim the good news of Jesus to me; so that I remember who I am and what I'm a part of; so that I can preach to them and they can preach to me through these songs; and so that I walk out of here, and on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday, I have these songs in my heart. I'm filled with the Spirit of God and I can live a wise life, knowing and doing the will of God. Like those types of things should be our intentions.

But when we simply talk about five acts of worship, and we're following God's commands, we're restoring New Testament Christianity because we do it all right, it's like whoa, whoa, whoa. I'm all about

restoring New Testament Christianity if by that we mean we're getting back to the heart of things, we're getting back to doing Bible things in Bible ways for Bible reasons, meaning I'm doing this so that I can live a Spirit-filled life. And not just me; I'm doing this so Bob and Susie and Fred and Sally -- so that we can all go out and live Spirit-filled lives. That has to be our thinking; it has to be our intention. And, yes, I believe, with every fiber of my being, that a cappella singing helps to accommodate that better than other things.

And, again, I'm not trying to be accusative. I'm not trying to be condemning. I'm just saying I believe that there is a long history of theologians and preachers and Christians, for thousands of years, who have believed and taught exactly this, that this is what we're trying to accomplish. We're singing these words, and there's been a lot of theologians who have said to bring in -- whether it be the organ or whether it be bring in cymbals and bells, I mean, they said -- and I agree with them -- that to do that is a distraction and it's just out of place in this thing because of what we're trying to accomplish.

What we're trying to accomplish is not making God happy. It's not like God is sitting up there sad and we're trying to cheer him up or something, and it's not like God is ready to throw a lightning bolt down and we're trying to appease his wrath and anger. His wrath and anger have already been appeased. Jesus has swallowed up our condemnation. We're singing to him because he's made us happy. We're singing to him so that we become a people who go out and live by his Spirit.

TRAVIS: Yeah. I was just thinking that, again, just the -- because I think we can get into the weeds, whether it's with instruments or overcomplicating a cappella, it's like -- as fun as that can be, it's like -- I mean, look, I like music as much as anybody, but I do like this idea, and it just -- it feels very Jesus to me, of being kind of dressed down and being able -- like, yeah, we have a building and we come and we want to take care of that and use that to the fullest advantage, but I like the idea that we could go outside. I like the idea that we could do this anywhere. I like the idea that no matter what the world -- what happens in the world, you and I are still going to get together and we're going to sing and we're going to -- you know, and we're going to do these things for each other and before God to praise God. It's like -- again, I think you can get into the weeds, whether you're doing it with instruments or whether you're --

WES: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, we can complicate four-part harmony so that you can only do it -- you can only, quote-unquote, do it right when you have song leaders and you have, you know, bass and tenor and soprano and alto. And you're exactly right. And what a beautiful picture that -- again, I think there's a theological foundation for all of this in that the temple worship was very complicated. And by design it was complicated and ornate, and there were all kinds of different things that went into it, and there were Levites and there were priests and there were singers and there were instrument players and there were sacrifices and there was incense and there were altars and there were all of these things. They were all attached to this temple worship.

But then, in the New Testament, the Spirit of God flows out like a river to all nations and we all get brought in. And Paul puts it in several different passages, like in Ephesians 2, that we are living stones, that we are making up this new temple. And like you said, that -- this kind of worship can happen in a prison cell, like Paul and Silas. It can happen in a basement; it can happen outside under a tree; it can happen in a synagogue; it can happen in a building; it can happen in a home; it can happen wherever, and we don't need these, you know, complications.

And there's a simplicity to it and a beauty to it that says, where is the temple? It's right here. And don't you know that was so weird in the first century when people would say, you know, "Where's your God?" "Well, my God is in heaven." "Okay. No, no, no, but I mean like where's the image of your God?" And you could point and you could say, "Actually, you're an image of my God and I'm an image of my God, and that person over there, they're an image of my God. We don't have any graven images of our God." "Well, no, no, no, I mean like where's your temple?" "Actually, me and my brothers and sisters, we are the temple to our God." "No, no, no, I mean like where does he live?" "He lives right here in us." And, "No, no, no, I mean like who are your priests?" "Well, actually, we are all this priesthood." You know, and it's like, "Well, no, no, no, but I mean" -- and it's just totally different. "Well, where does your -- where does your service to your God happen?" "Right here on the street; that's where it happens. It happens when I feed you and I put a roof over your head and I take care of my family and I love you in the name of Jesus."

And all of these -- there is an incredible simplicity to Christianity, and I don't know that it would have spread or changed the world the way that it has had it been connected to or had we given the impression that it has to happen in a building or that Christianity happens in a building. I mean, yeah, I do believe that we -- we are a family and it's good for a family to have a house. My family has a house; your family has a house, and you get together with your family in a house. That's good. There's nothing wrong with that. That's great. But family doesn't happen in a house. That's part of my family life, but family happens everywhere. It happens everywhere we are because we are family and we take care of each other and we do what family does.

Same thing with Christianity. Christianity happens all over the place. It spills out all over the place and it's not attached to and it's not dependent on all of these things. And we can so overly complicate what we're doing in our singing and our praising God that we give the impression that it's attached to these ceremonies or these objects or this place, and we don't want to do that. And I think that a cappella singing, if done intentionally, it lends itself to that beautiful simplicity that brings people together, focuses on God, focuses on the message of Jesus, and doesn't unduly or unnecessarily complicate things or attach or make dependent the worship on a place or on certain objects.

TRAVIS: You made me think of the idea that -- as somebody who loves performance and entertainment and show biz, it's like when I go up to do something in worship, just from a practical standpoint, being involved in the worship, whether it's leading a prayer or leading

thoughts before the Lord's Supper or leading singing, it's like I can't quite get out of my head that there's a performance. I'm sure you can identify with this a lot --

WES: Sure.

TRAVIS: -- because, you know, with preaching it's like you're getting up there, you're getting on stage, there's lights on you. There's a microphone to amplify your voice to everybody there. It's set up like a performance. And you do -- and I don't think there's anything wrong with the urge to do your best and to give a -- I remember the line that we would always hear from people growing up was "decently and in order," very important for --

WES: Right. And Paul uses that phrase.

TRAVIS: Paul uses that. But I have to kind of -- I remember a couple times, doing the Lord's Supper this last year, I've kind of stopped myself and tried to be like, okay, yes, there's the performance. I want to do my best. I don't want to stumble over words and things. But for me, one of the things that gets me is I don't want to get emotional, you know? Because it's the combination of being forced to focus -- it's like you're up there -- I'm completely focused on the words because I'm the one saying them. And being in the -- and just the pressure of having a lot of eyes on you, and I kind of stop myself of like, yeah, let that sink in. Like one of my favorite lines from a song is "Falling apart is just the start of the show." Like there's something nice about that. There's something nice about times where I've gotten emotional or I've seen people get emotional when they lead, whether it's singing or just a prayer or -- that

gets very deep and thoughtful and emotional.

And, again, I'm not saying that that has to happen for it to be good worship, but that just letting it be something that's like -- it's just going to happen, and we're going to do this, we're going to say these words, we're all going to say them at the same time. We're going to sing them, and that's going to be good because it's going to be good for you. It's good for me to say it to you and to hear it from you. It's like there is just something nice about the simplicity of like it's not about the performance. It's not about how I'm singing for the guy in front of me. Although, you know, I'm sorry.

WES: But you're bringing out a tremendous point, Travis, because there's something raw about singing, and it's embarrassing, you know. And I think that that's one reason why -- you know, I'll look around sometimes in different assemblies and I'll see, especially men -- and I struggled with this, especially as a young man, about not singing because, like you said, I'm sorry, you know, because we do -- like it feels weird and there's no other setting in my entire -- in my life there's no other setting except here where anybody else hears me sing. Like if I'm singing in my car, I'm by myself. You know, if I'm singing in the shower, nobody's around to hear me sing, you know, so I'm -- this is the place where we sing so that other people can hear us, and it's raw.

But there's something beautiful about that. There's something beautiful about the fact that we are being authentic and real and that we're not hiding our voice behind anything else and that people can hear us sing. They can hear the tremble in our voice; they can hear our

emotions. And I'll tell you, as much as it makes us self-conscious to think about somebody else hearing us sing, I love hearing somebody else sing. I love sitting right by my wife and hearing her voice as she praises God. I love not knowing somebody very well and sitting in front of them in worship and hearing their voice, and I think, man, I'm getting -- I'm getting to hear their praise to our Father. It's almost like if you overheard a tender moment between your sibling and your parent. It's like if you're -- one of your sisters or your brother was to say to your dad, you know, "I love you and I'm so thankful for you," and you just kind of overheard this tender moment between your sibling and your parent -- you might tease them a little bit; I don't know.

TRAVIS: Of course.

WES: But you would be like, man, that was cool and I'm glad I got to witness that, and that's what we get to witness. We get to witness our siblings saying to their Father, "You're taking such good care of me and I love you," and there's nothing hiding their voices. It's just raw and unfiltered and real and genuine and authentic. And as much as we live in a generation that's all about authenticity and taking the filters off -- I mean, how much more should that be relevant today to say we believe in authentic, real, raw, unfiltered worship to God? We want to hear your voice. We want to hear you whisper to our God and shout to our God what an amazing, wonderful Saviour he is.

And so, I mean, there's something to that, and I think that that's -- that's getting to the heart of what worship should be. And the beautiful part of it -- now, does that mean that we're all on tune and -- and I

believe in that. I believe in doing things well, and if we're going to lead it, then we should.

TRAVIS: Absolutely.

WES: But you also -- you hit on participation versus spectatorship, you know, and we live in a very entertainment-driven world, and, I mean -- and so was the first century, for that matter. I mean, they had theaters -- amphitheaters, and they had --

TRAVIS: Bread and circus.

WES: Right. Exactly. So they got that. They understood. The word "hypocrite" actually comes from a word that means "actor." I mean, that's exactly what a hypocrite was, was an actor. So they understood plays and they understood performances and singing and they understood being an audience, but that's not the picture that you get about the first century assembly of Christians, to sing and to read scripture is that they're participating in something.

And it's all about unity and it's all about mutual submission and mutual edification. It's all about participation, and I think that a cappella singing especially lends itself to participation, and that's what -- even when I'm preaching, yes, I'm the only person talking, but I try really hard to help people understand that we're participating in something. That's why I'll even ask questions, you know, and I'll, like, do pregnant pauses and I'll even be like, "Do you remember when he said this?" Or "Who was it that did this?" And I'll leave a little second. You know, the overstudious ones will shout out, "That was David." It's like, yeah, you get an A+ today. So, I mean, we're engaging in this conversation

together. This isn't a performance in that -- and I understand the way you're using the word "performance," that, yes, you want to do well and you want to be polished and you want to be intentional, but it's all to draw people together into a mutual-participation thing.

The moment we take Christian music -- the moment we take the assembly and we sort of elevate performers above everyone else -- and, again, it's very possible that we give that impression with song leading or with preaching, or with whatever, and we want to avoid that. We have to be so very intentional that what we're trying to promote is unity and participation, that it's not about -- and I've often wondered, is having a song leader the best model?

I love the way we do song leading here because I love the way our song leaders -- they step out from behind the pulpit, they have the mic in their hand, and they're really being intentional about trying to draw the congregation -- I won't say "audience" because they're not an audience. They're trying to draw the congregated people, the assembled people, into a participatory act of singing praise to our God, and they're really leading and directing. It's almost like -- I think we ought to picture it like a conductor is conducting an orchestra or a choir. That's what the song leader is doing. Not that he's the performer, but that he is conducting the chorus in song to our God, and we're all participants in that, and what an amazing thing that is. And I think that we have to get better -- McDermott, but also churches of Christ, in general, I think we have to get better at explaining these things this way, to say this is not about what we're against. It's not about what we're against. It's not about what

we're condemning; it's about what we're for. We are for the participation of all people in a mutually edifying, mutually encouraging, unifying, submissive act of praise to our God, and it's raw and it's unfiltered and it's unifying and it's participatory and it's exciting and it's heartrending.

And I think we need more songs that are laments. You know, we have to be able to rejoice with those who rejoice but also weep with those who weep, and that's why Paul tells us to sing the psalms. And we have -- and I think we're getting to that. I actually think that -- I think that our singing -- I love what Keith Lancaster and what the people at Praise & Harmony are doing. Mike Rogers, he's a good friend of mine, and I love the work that they're doing because they're taking some of these deep, theologically rich songs and they're helping God's people to learn to sing those things. And some of them are not rah, rah, repeat the same three words over and over again types of songs. They're laments that say the world is broken and it's dark and it hurts and we're hurting, but we trust God is going to deliver us, and we have to be able to sing those songs together.

And even if I'm not going through a dark time, you might be, and the fact that I can sing it with you and we sing it together as a family -- this is why I believe in a cappella singing, because it's not about coming and, you know, getting this shot in the arm so that I'm emotionally stirred for a few days, and it's not about, you know, seeing a great performance. It's about being a part of something so that when I walk out of here on Monday or walk -- hopefully, I don't come in Sunday and

leave on Monday, but when I walk out of here on Sunday and I live my life on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday, then I remember I'm a part of something and we continue to sing together even when we're not singing together.

Let me read one more passage. I know we're probably getting close on time, but in Colossians Chapter 3 -- it's another passage we go to all the time when we talk about singing a cappella, but Colossians 3, starting in verse 16, it's very similar to what Paul says in Ephesians 5, but here he says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," and that's the imperative. I promised I wouldn't say "adverbial participle" anymore, so I won't say that anymore, but --

TRAVIS: I'm going to start bleeping it out.

WES: Yeah, exactly. So "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." That's the command. And then he says, "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

And, again, I mean, people are right when they say, well, this isn't talking about worship -- or not talking about the Sunday assembly, and that's true. Paul is talking about your whole life. But, again, you can't fulfill this idea of singing to each other unless you're assembled. That's how it works. But he's talking about your whole life and he's talking about how do you live your life. And this idea of whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus -- I've always

heard that passage quoted as in everything you do has to be authorized by scripture in worship, although, you know, they do all kinds of things that aren't specifically authorized by scripture.

But what does he mean by that, "Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus"? He means everything that you do should be saturated with Jesus. Everything should be saturated with the gospel because you're singing to each other, you're letting the word -- and that doesn't just mean like the commandments of the Bible -- the word of Christ, the message of Christ, the story of Jesus dwell in you richly. And that happens, in part, through our singing. But the question is, are we intentionally doing that? Are we coming here so that we can be filled up? Because, I mean, at the end of the week, a lot of times you're just drained. The world has drained it out of you, and you come here and you get filled up with the gospel and you're like, this is who I am. This is what I'm a part of. These are my people. This is our mission. Here's where I'm going. Here's what I'm doing.

And we march out into the world so that we can do everything in the name of Jesus. And that means we can go to work and fill out those reports and type those things and deal with our boss and deal with the gossip around the water cooler, and we can do those things in the name of Jesus and we can bless people in the name of Jesus and we can help people in the name of Jesus and we can work for our Master. He'll go on to talk about households and, you know, if somebody was a servant, how in the world are they supposed to serve their master who is an awful human being? How are they supposed to serve them in the name of

Jesus unless they are letting the word of Christ dwell in them richly?
And how is that going to happen unless they come together with their
brothers and sisters and sing?

And, I mean, think about that. So think about a first century assembly, and you might have this rich woman like Lydia, who's a seller of purple. You might have a rich merchant woman who is a free woman, and she's well-dressed and she's got a life that other people would envy, and so she's part of this assembly. And then you have this poor Jewish woman who's had a very hard life and who's got hands and a face like leather. You know, she's worked hard and she's -- you know, she's not somebody that people would envy her life, but people respect it. And then you have a woman who was a prostitute, and then you have a man who is a slave and who is abused by his master, and then you have a man over here who's a Roman citizen and who's doing really well and pretty well off financially. You've got all of these people that come together in this family and they sing this song and they say we're in this together. This is who our King is, and this is what we're doing, and this is what we're a part of. This is our mission. And everything you do, whether you're speaking words or you're doing deeds, do it in the name of Jesus. And when you go -- our slave friend, when you go tomorrow and you work for your master, work for him not like you're working for him but like you're working for the Lord and you bless him in the name of Jesus. And you, seller of purple cloth, when you go and you sell purple cloth, when you go and you live your life in the city, you bless people in the name of Jesus. And you, elderly Jewish woman, when you go and you

serve your neighbor, do it in the name of Jesus. You know, all of these people, when you go out and live your life -- and part of the way that comes about is through singing together, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

But I don't know that -- you know, when we're only focused on checking something off a list -- "Why do you do that?" "Because I'm commanded to." Oh, man, what a shallow answer is that. "Why do you believe in a cappella singing?" "Because that's what God tells us to do so that's what I'm going to do." Well, that's just -- you know, I just don't even recognize that.

TRAVIS: I think he wants us to think more than that.

WES: That's exactly right, think more than that and be blessed more than that. If that's all you're trying to get out of it, that's all you will get out of it. If you're only coming here and singing these songs because you think you have to, then you'll walk away feeling like you've done what you had to do. You checked something off a list. You punched your card, and you'll get that out of it. But if you come here so that you walk away a little more filled with the Spirit and with the word of Christ dwelling in you more richly, you come here to encourage and bless your brothers and sisters, you come here so that you can go out into the world and do everything in word or deed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ -- you come here with that in mind, you come here with that intention, and that's exactly what you're going to walk away with. You come here because you're so happy because of what you have in Jesus that you have to sing, and if you didn't sing you'd just explode, then that's exactly

what you're going to accomplish.

But when we come here just because we're compelled to, well, not only is God missing out on real heartfelt praise, but we're missing out on the blessing, and our brothers and sisters are missing out on the blessing. Imagine how differently we would sing if we sang with these scriptures and these ideas in our heart and mind versus just trying to check something off a list.

I want to thank my church family, the church of Christ on McDermott Road, and our editor, Travis Pauley, for making this podcast possible. And thank you for listening. If you haven't already done so, please rate, review, and subscribe to the podcast on Apple Podcast, or wherever you're listening. I also want to invite you to check out Logos Bible Software, who has partnered with us to give our listeners a great discount. Just go to RadicallyChristian.com/logos. I think you'll love the software and you'll get a great discount by using that link.

As always, I love you, God loves you, and I hope you have a wonderful day.

- Wes