

"For Paul, that's what it comes down to, and that's the phrase that he uses, is to honor the Lord, or 'in honor of the Lord.' If something is in honor of the Lord, it's not wrong. If somebody is doing this in good faith and it doesn't violate any scripture, it's not sinful, it's not wrong, and they're doing it in honor of the Lord, then let them alone."

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, so we -- somebody answered the call -- or made the call.

TRAVIS: They made the call.

WES: But they answered our call to call in and leave a voicemail, which I'm really happy about. So we have a voicemail that we're going to play, but before we play that, let me just remind anybody that's listening that we would love to play their voicemail, so if they have a question or a thought that they'd like for us to discuss, they can call (707) 238-2216 and leave us a voicemail and we would love to play it on a future episode of the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast, but we're going to play this voicemail and then we'll talk about the question.

VOICEMAIL RECORDING: Hi, Wes. This is Rachel calling

from Chicago, Illinois. I love everything that you and Travis do on the podcast. Everything is so great. I have a question. I live in a predominantly Catholic town, and it's that time of the season where everyone starts putting out their nativity scenes, and I have a four-year-old and she's very observant, and I, you know, struggle with being raised in a church that was just kind of a -- nobody really talked about it. They were just, you know, Jesus -- we don't know when his birthday was and we don't have the authority to celebrate his birthday, so it was kind of always just a negative thing. And now, living in a town where it's very predominant and my four-year-old is asking questions, and I just want to be able to give good answers, you know, and explain it well and to be at peace with everyone in our town and those around us. So I just wanted to see if you could shed some light on that, what would be some great ways to talk to people about it in a respectful way. Thanks so much for all you do. Bye.

WES: Awesome. And that was Rachel, right?

TRAVIS: Uh-huh.

WES: Rachel, from Chicago, thank you so very much for leaving that voicemail, and I love the topic and it's a great time of year for us to talk about this, and it's something that's near and dear to my heart because I

grew up in a very similar way that it sounds like Rachel did. I grew up believing that it was wrong to celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday. I did not grow up believing that it was wrong to celebrate Christmas as a secular holiday. Like we did Santa Claus and we did Christmas trees and presents and all of that stuff, but I believed that it was wrong; as Rachel said, that we did not have the authority to celebrate Jesus' birthday. So that was similar to how I grew up, and I understand that sentiment. And I'll say, before we even get into the discussion, that I personally still don't -- you know, we don't have a nativity scene; we don't make a big deal about Christmas being Jesus' birthday, but my thoughts have -- "dramatically" might not be too strong of a word to use -- but dramatically have shifted over the years about the way that I feel about this subject, and they're still continuing to evolve over time as I continue to dive into scripture and I try to separate what is my tradition, what did I grow up with, you know, thinking, and what is actually biblical.

So do you want to add anything about the way you grew up,
Travis?

TRAVIS: Yeah. We -- like you said, we celebrated Christmas probably more as a secular holiday, not necessarily a commemoration of Jesus, but it was never something, particularly in my family -- although we've known lots of people over the years and are close with lots of people who aren't comfortable celebrating it, but it wasn't something that we necessarily were super passionate about one way or the other.

WES: Right, right. I guess I probably lost a lot of friends when I was in elementary school telling people that's not actually the day Jesus was

born. It was actually surprising to me, as I became, probably, a teenager and realized that most of the religious world that celebrates December 25th as Jesus' birthday, they actually don't believe it was his actual historical birthday.

TRAVIS: Oh, for sure.

WES: They understand that, historically, that probably was just a date that was chosen for various reasons, and so they understand the historicity of that question, and sometimes I think we don't necessarily give them the benefit of the doubt. We think that people actually think that December 25th was the day of his birth --

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: -- rather than a day that was simply set aside by religious people a long time ago for various reasons. But let's kind of zoom out, not just to talk about Christmas or Jesus' birth, or anything like that, but in a more general way, let's talk about religious days.

Now, here's something that's really interesting. Because we come from a restoration background, which I very much embrace and I very much believe in, I very much believe in the restoration plea which says that we only do the things for which we have biblical precedent; we only do things -- we only embrace ideas and practices and doctrines that we find in scripture. I very much believe that. I very much am in line with that. So that brings up an interesting question: Do we have a biblical reason -- do we have a biblical precedent to create holidays? Do we have a reason to believe that God is either against that or for that or God is ambivalent towards that? That's a legitimate question, to say what of

making days and setting aside a day to celebrate or commemorate a special thing in honor of the Lord or in honor of something that the Lord has done? Is that right? Is that wrong? Is it neither right nor wrong? Does scripture speak to that idea? That's an interesting question, and so maybe we can find an answer to that, and I think that we can.

I often encourage people to think about the holiday of Purim, which is in the book of Esther. Esther Chapter 9, starting in verse 27, says, *"The Jews firmly obligated"*-- if somebody's not familiar with the story of Esther, the entire population of the Jewish race was about to be wiped out in the Persian empire, and Esther, who was a Jewish woman, was elevated to the position of queen and she was in a unique position to save her people and she thwarted the efforts of Haman, who was going to exterminate the Jewish people from the Persian empire, and she thwarted those efforts, and the tables were turned. It's a tremendous, marvelous story. And at the end of the story, they set aside a day of Purim to commemorate what had happened. It says, *"The Jews firmly obligated themselves and their offspring and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year, that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every clan, province, and city, and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants."*

So, I mean, here you have a group of Jewish exiles who have experienced salvation from the Lord and who set aside a special holiday

to celebrate what God has done in delivering their people, and they said we're going to do this every single year. These two days we're going to celebrate as -- and they continue to do so to this day. The Jewish people continue to celebrate Purim. And there were holidays that were given in the Torah; there were holidays that God gave, like Passover and the Sabbath and Sabbath years and the Year of Jubilee, and all of these things that God laid out, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of -- or we might say the Feast of Booths. So there were all of these holidays that were specified in the law, in the books of Moses. But then, in addition to that, they created -- without any sort of prophetic word from God, they created -- on their own initiative, created this day to commemorate what God had done. And the biblical author simply records that without any condemnation to say they shouldn't have done that, or they -- in violation of the law. There wasn't any -- there doesn't seem to be -- from reading the book of Esther, there doesn't seem to be any reason to think that anyone saw this as a violation of the law, to create a special day to remember what God had done.

Now, somebody might push back and say, well, yeah, Wes, but that's during the Old Testament times; that's not during the New Testament times. Well, that's an interesting question -- or an interesting thought. So we might think about the fact that during the intertestamental period, which is the period in between like the last prophets, like Malachi, and the coming of Jesus and what is recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, during those 400 years, there was a lot that transpired during that time, including the rise of the Greek Empire,

and then there were some kings that came along after Alexander the Great, and one was Antiochus Epiphanes, and during his reign they made Judaism illegal. They made it illegal to have a copy of the Torah; they made it illegal to circumcise their children; they made it illegal to keep the law. And there were some -- and they captured the temple. They sacrificed pigs on the altar of God; they worshipped idols within the temple so that the temple was desecrated. It wasn't destroyed. This was the rebuilt temple after the exiles came home, but it was desecrated and it was contaminated, and so the Jews, under the Maccabees, drove out the Greeks from Israel. They retook their country, essentially. They recaptured Jerusalem. They captured the temple and then they rededicated the temple to God and they created a feast that commemorates the rededication of the temple. We refer to that as Hanukkah -- or they referred to that as Hanukkah, the Feast of Rededication. And so during that time period the feast of Hanukkah came about, and it's interesting that even John records, in John Chapter 10 -- this is verses 22 and 23. It says, *"At that time, the Feast of Dedication,"* which is Hanukkah, *"took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon,"* so John says Jesus was in the temple during the Feast of Dedication.

Now, it seems like the most natural reading of that would be that Jesus came to Jerusalem and was a part of what was going on at that feast, that Jesus wasn't abstaining from it. Jesus didn't say, and John doesn't record, that Jesus had a problem with Hanukkah because it was a non- -- quote-unquote, nonbiblical holiday, that they didn't have the

authority to create a feast like Hanukkah. Jesus seems to be participating. And I'm positive -- I have absolutely no doubt, as a young Jewish boy, that Jesus, every year with his family, celebrated the Feast of Rededication. They celebrated Hanukkah because they were Jewish people and that's what Jewish people did, and every year he celebrated Purim because that's what Jewish people did. They remembered what God had done in helping them to retake the temple and rededicate it to God. They remembered at Purim what God had done to save his people through the deliverer, the savior Esther who points forward to Jesus himself. And so there doesn't seem to be any -- not only does there not seem to be any biblical prohibition against creating a nonbiblical holiday to celebrate something that God has done, but, in fact, there seems to be a biblical precedent for the fact that it's okay to create a special day on which to remember something great that God has done.

Now, again, somebody might push back -- and I understand this. A person has every right to, and I don't mean to speak disparagingly about anybody. I understand what they're saying. So somebody might push back and they say, well, Wes, but you're not differentiating between secular holidays and religious holidays. It's okay to create a secular holiday like the 4th of July where you're celebrating your country's independence. It's okay to create a national holiday; it's not okay to create a religious holiday.

I think -- and I want to say this as sensitively as possible because I know that there's going to be people listening that feel exactly that way, and I understand that, but I think there are more problems than that idea

creates than it solves. Yes, I understand and I embrace the idea that, as Christians, that we need to embrace biblical ideas and biblical doctrines. As I said, it seems to me that there is a precedent for creating holidays other than what we find specified in scripture. That's a biblical precedent that Jesus observed, that the Jewish people observed up until the time of Jesus. So there is a biblical precedent for that.

What there's not a biblical precedent for is compartmentalizing our life so that we have a secular life and a religious life. That's what there's not -- only not a biblical precedent for, but I would actually argue that the vast majority of scripture would speak against that idea. It is highly problematic for us to compartmentalize our thinking to say this is the nationalistic part of me; I'm only celebrating this as an American, not as a Christian. And that's what we've tended to do in Western Christianity, not just in our lifetime, but over the last several hundred years where we have -- we have compartmentalized our life to the extent that we could celebrate a day and say this has nothing to do with God.

Wait a second. Why is there anything in your life that has nothing to do with God? Well, this doesn't have anything to do with Jesus; this is just because I'm an American, or this is just because I live in the United States, or this is just because I live in the South, or I live, you know, in Texas, or whatever it is. I celebrate this as a Texan. I celebrate this as an American. It's like, wait a second. You are a Christian in everything. This goes back to like Colossians 3:17, a passage we've talked about before, where Paul says everything that you do, whether you eat or you

drink, everything that you do, you do in the name of the Lord. In I Corinthians he says *"to the glory of God,"* everything has to be done that way. If you think that Jesus simply celebrated the feast of Hanukkah as an Israelite because of his ethnicity and he's like, well, this is totally disconnected from my relationship with God -- no, he didn't think that way. There wasn't a part of Jesus that was secular and just Jewish and part of him that was devoted to God. To be Jewish was to be devoted to God. To be him was to be devoted to God. And for us, we don't need to break apart our life into these little cells where we say, well, this part of me is just American and this doesn't have anything to do with my discipleship. Or this over here -- and so that goes far beyond a discussion about holidays, and that reveals something very dangerous in our thinking, our mentality, our doctrine, our theology, and I think that we need to be -- if anybody uses that argument -- and, again, I've heard that argument. I've probably used that argument to say, well, I just celebrate Christmas because that's what we do in my family, or that's a secular holiday for me. Okay. I understand what you're saying, and yes, you know, I get it that there's some things that I do, you know, with my family, like watch television, that I wouldn't necessarily want to be part of the assembly, but I can't watch television not as a disciple of Jesus. Whatever I watch on television, it has something to do with my discipleship. What I don't watch, what I do watch, why I watch it, how I watch it, when I watch it, how much I watch it, all of those things have to be shaped by and affected by my discipleship. And for me to say I'm going to have this feast once a year and I'm going to give gifts and I'm

going to celebrate and there's going to be this jovial atmosphere, but I don't want it to interfere with my discipleship or I don't want my discipleship to interfere with that, that's a problem.

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: And so even just that idea that we can separate it out, I think we need to examine that. And when we use that argument, a red flag ought to go off in our mind to say, wait a second. Where do I get the biblical authority -- if we want to talk about authority, where do I get the biblical authority to compartmentalize my life where I can have a holiday that has nothing to do with God or nothing to do with Jesus? That seems to be problematic to me.

But let's get back to the idea of can we, should we, is it okay to? And, again, there does seem to be a biblical precedent for creating a day where we say, okay, let's have this day and let's celebrate what God has done for us in this day. Another argument against that might be the traditions of men. Somebody might say, yeah, but didn't Jesus like criticize people for elevating their traditions and celebrating their traditions rather than the commandments of God? They might quote something like Matthew 15:6 that says, *"For the sake of your tradition, you've made void the word of God."*

But what people sometimes don't understand is that Jesus wasn't condemning manmade traditions. If we think that Jesus is condemning any manmade tradition, we're all in trouble because we all have manmade traditions that we've implemented into and made part of our religious life and our religious, you know, discipleship. Wednesday

night bible class, that's an example, or even a midweek bible study at all, whether it's Tuesday or Wednesday, or whatever. For us, it's Wednesday, and my whole life we've -- every Wednesday night, it's almost become a second holy day. You know, you've got Sunday and then you've got Wednesday night, you know, and they kind of go together, but that's a tradition. It's not wrong simply because it's a manmade tradition.

What Jesus is condemning in the context is the fact that they have so elevated their manmade traditions that they're ignoring the actual commandments of God. In this case, it was that they were not taking care of their parents and they were -- because they had this tradition where if you wanted to devote all of your finances, all of your money to God, you could devote all of it to God. And then your parents come to you when they're of a certain age and they say, okay, Travis, we need your help. We need you to take care of us. And you're like, oh, I'm sorry, all of my money is devoted to God. I can't care for you. And Jesus says your tradition is trumping your obedience to the commands of God. God commanded you to take care of your parents, but instead of doing what God commanded you, you're following your tradition. So a manmade tradition can be wrong, but it's wrong when it is made -- when following that tradition violates an actual commandment of God.

Now, could religious holidays fall into that? Maybe so. I can't think of an example off my head, but if by following that tradition you're actually violating something that God expressly said to do -- and, again, just doing the tradition isn't necessarily, you know, violating anything

God commanded you to do. It's like Wednesday night. If I'm more concerned about being here on a Wednesday night than I am taking care of my neighbor who's hurt and injured -- if my neighbor is on the side of the road and they're hurt, and I'm like, I'm sorry, God expects me to be at Wednesday night bible study -- well, wait a second. Now I've elevated my tradition of Wednesday night bible study --

TRAVIS: A routine.

WES: Right, exactly. My routine, my tradition, and I've elevated that above my commandment to love my neighbor as myself, well, then I have done exactly what Jesus said not to. *"For the sake of your tradition, you've made void the word of God."* That's the problem.

And is it possible that we take Christmas or Easter, or whatever, and we so elevate those holidays that we end up in some way violating an expressed command of God? I guess that's possible, just as it is with Wednesday night bible study or offering the collection right after the Lord's Supper, or Sunday night services, or any of these traditions that we all have. Everybody has these sort of religious traditions, and it's possible to think so highly of those and elevate those so highly that we end up violating the actual commands of God. But we've got to understand that traditions in and of themselves are just traditions. There's nothing wrong with them unless, by observing them, we violate commands of God.

TRAVIS: Well, and to kind of leapfrog off of a thought you just mentioned -- and feel free to correct me if my thinking is off because it very well could be. I don't love the idea of letting what anybody else is

doing surrounding a tradition, a holiday, a routine, or anything, determine how I think about it. Like I'm already -- I'm kind of excited because I'm trying something new this time of year with Christmas coming up. And the last couple years, as I get a little bit older, I don't really think about, you know, gifts and things like that. It's exciting to give. That's actually kind of a cool part of getting older and not being as excited about, oh, what am I going to get, but just, oh, I bet they'd like that, and that kind of thing.

But, also, I'm trying something different, going into it thinking about -- you brought up the contrast of something like the 4th of July. That's a great holiday, and it's always a good time and, you know, you have the barbecue and the fireworks and everything, but I did have this thought this year that's like that's a holiday where we celebrate something that, whether it's in my lifetime -- I hope not -- but, you know, whether it's in my lifetime or beyond, it's going to pass away. It's a kingdom that will pass away. And with all the feelings that we have around Christmas and is it just a manmade tradition that we shouldn't have anything to do with or is there something religious about it, I think that's up to me.

WES: Yeah, yeah.

TRAVIS: Like you said, you know, what lens am I viewing it through? Am I viewing it through the consumer lens? Am I viewing it through, you know -- even the lens of, well, I just want to get this right, well, it's like how could God change my heart in this time? We take a day out of the summer to celebrate our country and celebrate our independence

and all that. It's like what if I take a day out of the year or even kind of make it a whole month, you know, or even longer for some people -- I've already seen some Christmas stuff go up.

WES: Yeah, that's wrong.

TRAVIS: That is wrong.

WES: We're recording this pre-Thanksgiving, and it's wrong.

TRAVIS: It's wrong.

WES: The rest of this is just opinion, but that, that's doctrine.

TRAVIS: Yeah, you're not going to hear any arguments from me.

WES: Kidding, kidding, kidding.

TRAVIS: But like this is an opportunity to celebrate a man who came down and he cracked the code, you know? He came down, and the fact that we celebrate his birth, I think, is -- or the fact that I can do that, that I can take some time and reasonably expect everybody is kind of thinking about that, whether they admit it or not, it's exciting because it's like this guy was born. He had to be born like me. He had to grow up; he had to mature. He had a learning curve, just like I do, and that's comforting and that's exciting, and it does change -- again, it's not that -- I may do things differently this holiday. The makeup of it may be the same. You know, we're going to get together; we're going to have the dinner; we're going to give the gifts and everything; we're going to put up the decorations and all that, but the lens with which I view it is going to be different. I know that.

WES: Well, I mean, you brought up so many great points, Travis, because, yeah, I mean, the fact that our world -- the religious world and

even the nonreligious world, the fact that there are so many people thinking about the incarnation, God becoming man and saving the world and bringing this new era of human history and reigning as king, and *Joy to the World*, and we're singing these songs, the world is singing these songs, I mean, how could we be critical of that? You know, the fact that so many people are thinking and talking about Jesus, if nothing else -- if nothing else, we should join them in celebrating or at least be glad that they are celebrating and thinking about Jesus. I don't want to be in the business of saying, well, actually, this is the wrong time of year to be thinking about that. You should be thinking about that all year long.

And that brings up another point, and that's often been my criticism of people, you know, celebrating Jesus one time or two times a year, where they would -- you know, Easter and Christmas, and these are the days that they would celebrate either the resurrection on Easter or the birth on Christmas. And my argument would be, well, no, no, no, you don't need to do that one time a year. You need to be doing that every week. You know, every Sunday you need to be.

But wait a second. Why are those two things mutually exclusive? Why does celebrating the resurrection on a particular Sunday -- why does that negate or does that negate celebrating it every Sunday? I mean, it's kind of like a wedding anniversary. You know, if I take one day a year and tell my wife I am so thankful for our marriage, I love you so much, I'm so glad that God brought us together, does that negate the fact that I tell her I love her all throughout the year? Does that negate our marriage or the celebration of our marriage the rest of the year?

Should we not have anniversaries because, hey, you don't need to be doing that once a year; you need to be doing that every day? Well, yes, both. Why does it have to be either/or? Why does it have to be either every day or once a year? Why can't it be both? Why can't you celebrate something all year long and then also set aside a day where you celebrate that on a special occasion? I think you can. I don't think that there is necessarily anything that violates the other. I don't think you have to choose between the two.

So yes, I believe that every Sunday is resurrection Sunday. I believe we come together as God's people every single Sunday and we celebrate what God and Jesus has done for us and we celebrate the resurrection every Sunday. If we're not thinking about the resurrection every Sunday, we're not thinking about the incarnation every Sunday, the mystery of God becoming man and reigning as king over heaven and earth -- if we're not thinking about those things, not just on Sunday, but on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday -- if we're not doing that, then we're doing something wrong. But why would I be critical of someone especially celebrating it or celebrating it in addition to that any more than I would somebody celebrating a birthday once a year? It's like, you don't care about that person the rest of the year? Why are you celebrating their birthday today? Well, because I take aside one day and celebrate them in a special way in addition to -- not in the exclusion of, but in addition to everything else that I've been doing.

And so yes, it is a problem if somebody only is a Christian on Christmas and Easter. Yes, that's a problem, absolutely. But I think for

most people that celebrate those as religious holidays and celebrate those especially those times of year -- I think most people are trying to follow Jesus all year long.

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: And we could talk about other doctrinal problems, you know, and other kinds of things, and I understand that, but I'm saying why would this be something that we pick on? Why would this be something that we especially call out and say, see, you're wrong because you do this when you ought to be doing this all year long? Well, yes, you ought to be doing it all year long, but those two things are not mutually exclusive. You can celebrate an anniversary once a year and celebrate marriage all year long. You can celebrate the resurrection all year long and celebrate it on Easter Sunday. And Easter, by the way, is probably, historically, the day after the Passover when Jesus rose from the dead, so if we want to talk about actual dates, that one is probably pretty close.

But, you know, I mean, the incarnation, is that something we really stop and really give a whole lot of devotion and thought to, that God became a human being, that God became a baby, that the son of God, the second person of the Godhead, became a human child and grew -- as you were talking about, grew into a man and reigns as the Son of Man over heaven and earth? Is that something we just spend a lot of focused attention and time on? Probably not. So is it good for us to set aside a month to think about the anticipation of the Jewish people waiting for their Messiah to come, and then their Messiah, God in flesh, being born and laid in a manger? I don't know that that's wrong or bad. Why would

that be wrong or bad? Not only -- again, to go over the points we've covered, there's nothing in scripture that would say that those kinds of days are wrong. In fact, there's a biblical precedent for setting aside times of celebration, to celebrate specific acts of God and things that God has done. It's probably wrong to separate secular and religious things in our mind, so that's problematic.

But let's talk about Romans 14. Here's an interesting passage in which Paul specifically says -- and he's talking about Jewish and Gentile audiences, and he says, listen, it's going to be hard for these two groups of people to live together. The gospel came first to the Jew, but then it's also for the Gentile. It's for all of you. It's for all of God's -- it's for all of Adam's offspring that have been cut off from God, and now, through Jesus, are being reconciled to God, both Jew and Gentile. This gospel is for everyone, and everyone who clothes themselves with Christ is buried with Christ and confesses the name of Jesus is together in one covenant family with God. All of you are. And then he gives these instructions, starting in Chapter 12, about how to live together in harmony and how to live in the community. And then, in Romans 14, he says welcome each other, but not for the purpose of condemning each other over your -- and the Greek word is "dialogismos," one of my favorite words, and we interpret that as "opinions."

Now, when we say "opinion," we mean like blue is better than red. Like that's an opinion, right? We say, well, there's no factual statement about what color is best. You know, there's no data behind what color is best; it's just your opinion. But the word "dialogismos," "opinion,"

doesn't mean opinion like that. It means something that is your logical reasoning. It means something that -- a conclusion to which you've come based on your reasoning. Now, that -- he's specifically talking about religious reasoning, like you -- it's not just your gut feeling about certain things; it's about what you've -- you've studied the scriptures and you've thought about life in Jesus and you've come to certain conclusions, and for some people, you've come to the conclusion that this day ought to be honored.

Now, he's very generic when he talks about these things. He doesn't mention Sabbath; he doesn't mention Passover. He doesn't even talk about -- are you talking about Jewish days that some people honor, or are you talking about Gentile days that some people honor? He doesn't say either way. He's just very generic. He's like some people see these days as special and they honor the Lord in these ways on these days, and other people, they don't see it that way and they abstain from any celebration and they see every day as the same. And he says, listen, your job is to not condemn each other and to welcome each other regardless of your differences in dialogismos. Even though you disagree with each other, welcome each other and don't condemn each other, and that's what we have to try to do. And that's the challenging part, because as we come together as the body of Jesus, there are going to be some people that say, well, I think we ought to do something special on December 25th to honor Jesus as the Messiah, and other people are going to say, well, I don't see it that way. I think every day is the same, that we shouldn't set apart this day. And I need to welcome and love

and embrace both of those groups of people.

And so, you know, for me, I grew up, again, from a very, you know, kind of a strict way of thinking about these things, and so if I had a manger scene in my house, it would probably -- even though I feel the way I do now, I would still feel a little bit uncomfortable, probably. But if I go over to my brother or sister's house in Christ and they have a manger scene, do I need to condemn them? No, of course not. Why would I judge someone for honoring the Lord? For Paul, that's what it comes down to, and that's the phrase that he uses, is to honor the Lord, or "in honor of the Lord." If something is in honor of the Lord, it's not wrong. If somebody is doing this in good faith, and it doesn't violate any scripture, it's not sinful, it's not wrong, and they're doing it in honor of the Lord, then let them alone. And that's hard for some of us to do because we're like, no, no, no, Paul, we want an answer. Like should Sabbath -- should Christians -- or is it okay if Jewish Christians still don't work on Saturday? Like is that okay if they still think Sabbath is -- if they come to worship on Sunday, but the day before, on Saturday, they were sort of honoring that day, also? And Paul says let them alone. Let them honor in the name of the Lord. What about the Passover? I mean, isn't Jesus the ultimate fulfillment of the Passover? They're still eating a special meal on the Passover, Paul. And Paul says, let them alone. They're doing it in honor of the Lord.

But if you honor this day and someone else doesn't, be okay with that, too. Don't condemn them. Don't judge them. Don't force them to honor these days the way you do. And so that's the uncomfortable

situation that we live in, and that's why it is very difficult. And for the sake of unity, we need to be very careful, I think, even about our collective gatherings, because in a collective gathering, when we come together as a congregation, there's going to be some people that feel one way and some people that believe a different way, and that's okay, and we need to not make anybody on either side uncomfortable. I think it's a great opportunity for us to -- if everybody is thinking about the birth of Jesus, hey, Church, let's think about the birth of Jesus. But I could push that so far that I almost feel like I would almost compel someone who it would go against their conscience to turn this into Happy Birthday, Jesus time, and that would offend their conscience, and I need to be very careful that I don't do that. But at the same time, there are going to be those that, for them, this is a sacred time of year and I need to be very careful that I don't condemn them and I need to be very careful that I don't tell them, hey, you're wrong. You're wrong for celebrating this as a special time of year.

Paul is very specific. And, again, if anybody wants to argue with this, they've got to argue with Paul because, listen, he's very specific that some people honor -- and a lot of people will push back against what I'm saying by saying, well, no, Paul just meant Jewish holidays. But he didn't say that. And to insert that into the text and say, well, that doesn't apply to these types of holidays -- okay. I mean, if you want to -- if that's your dialogismos, you know, if that's the conclusion you've come to, okay. But the overarching picture here is you have to -- you have to welcome your brothers and sisters, and unless they're violating something the

scripture expressly says, you need to not condemn them. You need to welcome them and embrace them as your brother and sister even though they don't agree with your dialogismos and you don't agree with their dialogismos.

TRAVIS: Yeah, and I think -- and the thought I just had, you know, that we're supposed to judge things based on their fruits, and as much as, yes, Christmas can produce -- Christmas or any holiday, a day that we set aside to celebrate anything religiously -- directly religious or not, what else can it do? Can it produce -- is it just going to produce consumerism and a day for us to kind of go through a blind routine of giving gifts and getting gifts, and then we go home -- you pack up the car and go home?

But I get excited by like -- one of my favorite stories in history is in World War I, when -- I'm not going to get the facts wrong of what year or who did what, but on one of the horrible, horrible battlefields, Christmas comes around and there was a cease fire. There was an agreement they weren't going to fire that day, and at one point, they heard -- one of the sides heard singing on the other side of the trenches, and the other side kind of gets a little courageous and some of the guys start climbing the trench and walking over the battlefield, and they had a -- they not only stopped firing on each other, but they actually met in the field. They played soccer and they started -- you know, they took Christmas to sing and just have fun with each other, you know, the Germans and the other side. And it's like, man -- and the leaders hated that. They hated it and it never happened again for the rest of the war.

WES: Wouldn't it have been great if the Jesus idea had carried through

and the war had stopped completely?

TRAVIS: That would have been great. But I think -- there's a great podcast I listen to about -- that kind of dissects World War I, and there's letters from guys that were in that, that were there, many of whom didn't end up surviving the war because not very many people did. But there's letters of people talking about like that was the moment where it just clicked. What are we doing? Why are we doing this? This is -- you know, this is -- none of us know why we're here, but we know why we're on this battlefield celebrating right now, because we have something in common that we're celebrating.

And it's like that's -- you know, that's really special and that's -- you know, as many bad things as, you know, a holiday can produce, because anything -- because we're human and anything can produce badness in us, but taking time to stop the routine of life, stop -- you stop working. You know, it's such a big deal. Our government says we're going to -- you know, we're not going to work. Not that everybody will have the day off, but for the most part, companies and the state agrees this is going to be a day off, like that's -- that's something to consider. Because it's like, man, we're living in a machine that keeps moving no matter what, but we still have some days -- and maybe it's just for our sanity's sake, but either way, it's a time -- I think there's something special about that, having time to reflect on things that are important. And what's more important than, you know, taking the time to stop and consider the fact that God came to earth?

WES: Yeah. Yeah, I think that's a great place to kind of wrap up, and I

would just say that all of us have to come to our own dialogismos, come to our own conclusion about how we should treat these days and what days we are going to honor and what days that we are going to treat as the same as any other day. We all have to come to our reasoning, but we also have to love and respect the decisions of others. And I think there's something to be said, to your point, that this is a great opportunity to find common ground with people and then build from there. You know, there's a lot of disagreement and strife in the religious world, and has been for a very long time, so if we can find some common ground here and say, hey, you're talking about Jesus, we're talking about Jesus, let's build from there and see where that road will take us. That's what Paul always did. When he would go to a community, he would find common ground, either with Jewish people, and he would build from the common ground that they had, or even with pagans he would find some common ground. Hey, I see that you're religious, he says to the people of Athens. Let me tell you about the God that you don't know, and then he builds from there. So I think rather than demolishing our common ground, we ought to find common ground and build from there.

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

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

- Wes