

It says first -- first, I have to address the error and the evil in me. I have to allow the story of scripture and the person of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify me first and to work on me -- and I'm always a work in progress -- but there are some obvious things that need to be taken care of first before I try to minister to somebody else.

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.

TRAVIS: All right. Wes, we're back to the Bible study podcast. How are you?

WES: Yeah, I'm doing well. How are you?

TRAVIS: I'm great. Excited to be back.

WES: I know. We sort of -- kind of a peek behind the curtain here, but we kind of delayed putting out and recording some of these episodes because of everything that's going on in the world. The pandemic has created a bigger job load for you and for me, and so we have been doing more content production, but it's been the content of Sunday worship and Wednesday Bible class and those kind of things, and so because we've had so much else going on and been ministering to people here in digital ways, our podcast ministry has kind of become less important. But, hopefully, we can start to get back to that and record some of these,

and so I'm superexcited about recording another one.

TRAVIS: Likewise.

WES: Well, I thought we would -- instead of taking a question from the audience -- we do have several questions and I feel bad for not getting to those yet, but I'd like to do a series of episodes -- so this may be part one in a few episodes that we end up recording -- talking about the questions that we ask when it comes to scripture. I actually did a Bible class here not too long ago. I called it "Any Questions" and I allowed people to submit questions, but not for the purpose of answering them, for the purpose of allowing people to see how they might be answered if they were asking that question or a question that was similar. And so we took each question and used it as an example and said, "Okay. If you have a question like this, here's how you might go about studying the scriptures to find the answer to that question."

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: And so we used the questions more as an example or a springboard to begin to answer questions like that or to equip the class with the tools necessary to answer their own questions. Kind of feel like it's the difference between giving a man a fish and teaching a man to fish.

TRAVIS: Sure, yeah.

WES: And, I think, too often we do that when it comes to Bible questions. Instead of searching the scriptures diligently and trying to find an answer, we just ask somebody that we trust, you know, and, I mean, obviously, it's encouraging that people want us to discuss some of

the questions -- and that's not a bad thing and we'll continue to do that, and, hopefully, in the process of us explaining why -- "Well, here's the conclusion to which I've come" -- they help -- or that helps them to see how we got -- how we got that answer --

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: -- to help -- you know, to kind of show our work, to know this is kind of how you arrive at that conclusion.

But there's some big-picture stuff that I want to cover about asking biblical questions or asking questions about the Bible. In fact, that might be a good place to start. There's a very big difference between those two sentences that I just said. There's a difference between asking biblical questions and asking questions of the Bible. When we ask biblical questions, we're asking the same questions that the people in the story -- and when I say "story," I even mean like the epistles. You know, there are people in that story. You know, if you take the book of Ephesians, this is Paul, he's a person in the story, and he's writing to the church at Ephesus; they're a person in the story. And the people in the story, both Paul and the Ephesian church, are asking questions, so asking a biblical question is repeating their question. Here's what they were wondering; here's what they were asking; here's what's going on in that context. So there are biblical questions that come straight from the text and there are questions that are in our mind that we're asking of the text that aren't necessarily questions that the people in the story were asking.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: And that's the difference between -- if we want to use big words, that's the difference between inductive bible study and deductive bible study. Deductive bible study is what we tend to do. So we ask a question like, "What does the Bible say about piercings?" "What does the Bible say about tattoos?" "What does the Bible say about voting?" "What does the Bible say about" whatever, so you fill in the blank.

Well, I mean, those are deductive questions where we're saying, "I have a question about my life, about my world, about my context, about my culture, and then I'm going to go to scripture and try to find the answer to it. I'm going to deduce what scripture might say, what God's will might be on this subject based on what I can find in scripture." That's -- that's one way to study the Bible. I do not think that deductive bible study should be our primary way of studying the Bible, but, unfortunately, I feel like it is. I feel like we do that both knowingly and unknowingly, subconsciously and consciously.

So sometimes we do it, and like we'll even -- most of the questions that we get, you know, that people e-mail in to us -- and, again, there's nothing wrong with those questions -- are deductive questions. You know, "What if an elder's wife dies? Does he have to step down as an elder?" We get questions like that all the time. Or, you know, "What about clapping during worship?" Well, those are all deductive questions and they're actually questions that not only was the original audience not asking, they're not even really addressed, and so they're trying to find an answer to a question that isn't a biblical question. It doesn't mean it's a sinful question or a wrong question; it just means it's not a

question in the text.

And so most of our questions tend to be deductive, but we also sometimes subconsciously ask deductive questions. We don't even realize we're doing it. We'll open up the Bible and we read devotionally. And, again, there's nothing wrong with devotional-style reading, but what we don't realize is that we're often asking questions in our mind. We're struggling with something. You know, something's going on in our life. We're having a bad day or we just had a breakup or we're depressed or there's a worldwide pandemic, or whatever the case may be, and so we're reading and we're deductively asking, "What does this verse right here" -- and we're not even casting a wide net over the entirety of scripture most of the time. We're like opening up to a random passage and saying, "What does this verse say about my situation?"

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: Well, that's a deductive question, and I think that we have to be okay with the answer. Here's -- if I make no other point in this first lesson, here's the main point that I want to make, that when we ask deductive questions, we have to be okay with the answer "The Bible doesn't say anything about that. The Bible doesn't answer that question." And I think that's -- that's one of the most difficult assumptions -- difficult myths, maybe, to bust -- this is our Bible MythBusters episode. A myth that we have is that the Bible answers all of our questions.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: I think that's a myth. The Bible doesn't answer all of our questions. I was thinking about II Timothy 3:16-17. Paul writes to Timothy and he says, "All scripture is breathed out by God and it's profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." That is what scripture is sufficient to do. It's sufficient for equipping you to do the good works of God in righteousness, to live out a faithful covenant relationship with God.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: It's not sufficient to answer all of your curious questions. And that's the thing, is that some of our questions are just curiosity, you know, or they may even be practical questions. They may go beyond just curiosity, like, "What do you do if an elder has a wife who passes away while he's serving as an elder? Is he still the husband of one wife? Does he need to step down?" And so some of our questions may be very practical, but we have to be okay with the answer, "The Bible doesn't answer that question."

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: And I think sometimes we're not okay with that. Like we want to press it until it answers that question, and that can be problematic.

TRAVIS: Yeah. I think -- you know, I've been thinking about this lately, that one of the things Jesus addresses with the Pharisees at the time of his coming to Earth was that they were taking the law and they were, you know, building laws around it. They were -- you know, they had stopped understanding what the law actually meant for them and, you

know, I think the epistles from his followers are intended to tell us, "Don't do that again --

WES: Yeah, that's a good point.

TRAVIS: -- because you're going to have more material. We want you to know about Jesus. We want you to know his story here on Earth. We want you to know it so bad we're going to tell you four times in different ways." And they were passing around probably more stories than we even have in the New Testament today, and there is sort of this message of "Don't let that happen again. This is not something that is going to" -- there's never even a point where you can reference something as if it were the Ten Commandments in the New Testament.

WES: Yes, yes, that's so good.

TRAVIS: How do you build a legalistic, always-answer -- question-answering document out of the New Testament? Because it's all written like a story. Even -- we were just talking about the epistles have a story. There's -- and they're answering -- typically, they're -- I've had to remind myself lately they're answering specific questions at the time.

WES: Yes. Yeah.

TRAVIS: But that doesn't mean that it's not -- you know, it's rooted in truth.

WES: Yes. It's applicable and relevant, yeah, absolutely.

TRAVIS: It makes me think even of when Jesus would tell a parable and he would say, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." He'd tell a story, and then there's at least one case where his followers -- they don't

understand what he's saying.

WES: Oh, for sure.

TRAVIS: He says, "How am I going to tell you about heavenly -- I just told you something earthly. Remember I said, 'The kingdom of heaven is like' and then I told you about an earthly situation. How are you going to understand if I tell you about heaven for real if you can't even understand these earthly situations I'm painting for you?"

And I was just thinking about that and kind of meditating on that, like what he was actually saying there, and one of the things I've gotten out of it is just, you know, the Bible -- the New Testament, for us specifically, is addressing some very specific things. It's telling very specific stories about things that happen, and so I think that's more intended to change me from the inside out as opposed to give me a sheet that I can carry around and always reference throughout the day.

WES: I mean, you're hitting on so many great points, and I think that one of the truths even about the law, even about the Torah, you know, even about Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy -- so you have the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, the Law of Moses, even that didn't address every situation. There were a million situations that it didn't address.

We were -- I was talking to a couple the other day and we were talking about the divorce laws and we were looking at Deuteronomy 24 and talking about what Moses said about divorce. Like it's a very specific situation -- like very specific. The situation that Moses lays out in Deuteronomy is, "Okay. There's a man" -- he doesn't say "okay"; I just

inserted that. There's a man that marries a woman and then she doesn't find favor in his eyes because he finds some unclean thing in her, and -- and the scenario goes on. He puts her away and writes her a certificate of divorce and she remarries another man and he decides that he wants to take her back, and that's where the law says, "No, you cannot take her back. That would be an abomination. It would bring a curse upon the land." It was a very, very specific situation, that there's a woman who does something wrong, and, you know, then in Jesus' day they were debating that, like what kind of thing did she do wrong and he found some unclean thing in here? Like what does that mean and what's the grounds for divorce?

So there are a million situations like that, that the law and scripture covers like a very specific type of situation. A man steals your goat, or you're walking along and your enemy has an ox in the ditch. Well, what if it's not an ox? What if his chickens got loose, you know?

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: And so there's a million situations that aren't covered specifically in the law. There are so many situations. There are like 600 specific situations. "If this scenario plays out, here's what you do." Now, you could either say, "Well, God doesn't care about any of those other situations. If God cared about it, he would have addressed those." Well, maybe. Or maybe -- maybe the intention of the law is to make you wise, to shape you; like you said, to change you in such a way, to shape you in such a way, that you become a wise covenant member of God's family so that you understand if this was the situation -- and Paul even did that.

He said, "The law said when you have an ox who's treading out the grain" -- and you think about the ox going around in the -- you know, treading the grain, and he says, "The law says don't muzzle an ox." Well, Paul extrapolated from that and said, "Well, if that's true, then when someone is working in the gospel and somebody is teaching the gospel, then you ought to pay them. An ox who's treading out the grain ought to be able to eat the grain that he's treading out. You shouldn't muzzle him while he's treading out the grain; you should let him eat." And he said, "If that's true, if God cares about the ox and he cares that the ox has something to eat, then he cares about the mule and he cares about the cow and he cares about the human. And so if there's a human who's making his life teaching the gospel, then he ought to be able to be supported in that lifestyle, so don't muzzle your preacher and let him make a living from preaching the gospel."

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: And so the intention of the law was to make people wise, and Jesus' whole point was, "If the law had really made you wise, then when I showed up, when the Messiah showed up, when the Son of Man showed up, you would have recognized him. You would have run to him, and the fact that you didn't run to me, the fact that you didn't run to the Messiah, proves that you really don't know the law and you don't know the God behind the law."

But you're exactly right in that we've taken the epistles and the gospels and we've tried to make them like II Leviticus, or whatever, and we've tried to make them cover every specific scenario. And it's like,

well, maybe -- maybe the intention is for us to ingest them and to enter into -- here's the healthy way, I think, that we should think of scripture, is enter into the narrative of scripture, enter into the story of scripture.

Now, does that mean that we just are so vague and ambiguous about like specific rules? No, it doesn't mean that at all. It doesn't mean that we become just kind of wishy-washy and say, "Well, that might not apply to me and maybe that's not how I see it, and" -- no, no, no, not at all. In fact, Paul, again -- like when he's interpreting treading out the grain, he's very restrictive, like, "You don't have the option of not supporting evangelists because here's what the law says. Here's how it should make you wise." And so there's a right way and a wrong way to be part of this story and to live out this story, but we have to recognize that there's just a whole lot of things that aren't specifically covered by a chapter and verse.

But when you take the entire story, when you take the entire narrative with Jesus being the climax of that story, with Jesus being the pinnacle of that story, and you enter into it and bring -- you let it dwell in you, this is what Paul said. He said, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." He doesn't mean like memorize a bunch of scripture, like memorize book, chapter, verse. I'm not downgrading memorizing scripture, but he means let this whole message of Jesus dwell in you richly; then you live out a wise life. In the context of Colossians chapter 3 right there, and in Ephesians 5 when he says, you know, let the -- or, "Be filled with the Spirit," he's talking about wisdom. It's all about wisdom.

And once -- once you are trained in scripture -- this is what Paul is saying in II Timothy 3. He's saying, "All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." When you're trained in righteousness, you become wise, and so, you know, hey, if my enemy has an ox that's in the ditch, I'm supposed to help him out or I'm supposed to return his animal to him if it gets loose, then maybe that means I'm supposed to love my enemy. And what if my enemy is hungry or what if my enemy is thirsty? Is that law any less applicable to that? And so it's supposed to be something on which we meditate, something in which we're being trained so that we are wise. And it actually shapes -- it shapes our underlying assumptions so that when we ask questions, we ask better questions.

So I think that, to me, is one of the biggest things, is that sometimes our deductive questions are not the best. I always say there's no wrong question or there's no bad question, but some questions are better than others, and so there are some questions that reveal a better assumption. It reveals better preconceived ideas. We all have assumptions; we all have biases; we all have preconceived ideas about scripture, even if our preconceived idea was simply, "I think scripture answers every question I have, you know, specifically," and that's an assumption, but I think the more we are trained in the scriptures, trained by the gospel, trained by the message of Jesus, the better our questions start to get.

I apologize for the interruption, but if you're enjoying this Bible study, you might also enjoy the audio version of my book "Beyond the Verse." If you're not already an Audible subscriber, you can get the book for free with a 30-day free trial of Audible. Just visit radicallychristian.com/audible. Now back to the Bible study.

TRAVIS: Yeah, as you were saying that, I was thinking -- talk about like asking better questions, I think about -- I've had to kind of face like, well, what am I actually going to scripture for? Am I asking questions of it to change me or change somebody else? Because I think -- I think a lot of -- like I've noticed that the questions I ask when I'm -- when I have somebody else in mind, whether it's somebody specific, a group of people, an ideology, I ask really dumb questions. But when I go and I'm asking about myself, they're usually softball questions at the beginning, but they're better questions, and they may be a little bit broader and maybe it's going to take some time studying a specific passage of scripture, studying a specific book. I find that if I'm asking broader questions and it's to change me, it's in order -- because I need to be better, I need to get better at this, I ask broader questions that lead me to bigger parts of scripture. Whereas, when I'm asking dumber questions about changing somebody else, you know, "I want to have this answer ready next time I see so-and-so," I mean, it really -- I hope it's not too shocking that somebody can be that petty, but it's true, and when I ask those, those lead me to verses, but when I ask good questions of, "Well, I need to be better," it leads me to bigger passages and it -- you

know, how can that not be good? It makes me put more work in. It makes me read more.

WES: Contextualized answers.

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: That's so good, Travis, because I think that the way I grew up thinking about scripture -- and I don't know why. Again, I mean, sometimes when I think about how I grew up, I don't want it to reflect negatively on my parents because I don't think this came from them, but I think it's a typical way of reading scripture, that we use scripture as ammunition. And that's how I grew up reading the Bible, is I want ammunition. Like how -- I even had ways of highlighting my Bible that was -- now I'm looking back at it, it seems so ridiculous to read the Bible that way. I had ways of highlighting my Bible to use as ammunition against other people. If I'm studying with a person that has this ideology, here are the verses that I use for them. Here are the verses that I use. Now, I mean, that's not always wrong. You know, I mean, there are appropriate times to say, "Hey, this story or this passage or this chapter, it really helps to expose the error in what you're thinking," but that has to be done in love.

But we have to primarily -- and I think -- I love the way you said all that because I have to first address the evil in me. I first have to address the error in me, and so often when we go to scripture we want to use it to address the error in others. This is exactly what Jesus said when he said, "Listen, you have a plank of wood in your eye. Like you've got this huge 2-by-4 sticking out of your face and you're going to try to pick out a

speck out of somebody else's eye. Take the 2-by-4 out of your eye first and then you can see clearly to help the person with the speck." That doesn't mean that we never help the person with the speck. There's an appropriate time to say, "Brother, I love you, and because I love you, let me show you what this says." But it says first -- first, I have to address the error and the evil in me. I have to allow the story of scripture and the person of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify me first and to work on me -- and I'm always a work in progress -- but there are some obvious things that need to be taken care of first before I try to minister to somebody else.

TRAVIS: Yeah, and I think -- man, I just keep coming back to how -- how important it is to, like you said, ask better questions, that no -- no question is bad and there's no -- I certainly don't think there's any topic that is unmentionable amongst the faith. It's like, yeah, we need to talk about everything. We need to -- because especially in the context of a community of believers, you want to -- you want to think -- and I think it's readily apparent if there is a community of believers and that community is thriving to some degree, then there's wise people here. There's people that can help you. And so maybe some of those questions are more appropriate with other Christians, people who have been made wise by their study of scripture, and, like, that's a resource for us.

I think sometimes -- I know it's easy to get a little scared when it comes to the Bible because it's like, well, if the Bible doesn't answer it, then how am I going to know, you know? I don't hear God talking to me. We don't have prophets coming forth. You know, we don't -- as if that

would be really obvious. We wouldn't learn anything from scripture if we thought that, but -- but I've come to appreciate more and more that it's like, well, I think if we're to take the story of scripture for what it is and if we're to trust that Jesus -- you know, like he talks about with Peter, you know, that he's making a church and it's not going to -- it's -- no matter what happens going forward, the church is going to stand, well, then I bet we have plenty of people today that can help us, that have an authority on being wise and guiding us down the right path. So it's like, obviously, I think we need to be in scripture, but I think maybe there's also, for those questions -- maybe the more transparent of questions that we have to ask, maybe those are better answered by people who have been changed by scripture.

WES: Absolutely. You're making such a great point, and I think it highlights something that is, again, a product of the time in which we live. Our context is that we think that personal Bible study is a thing. Like, it is a thing and it's a good thing --

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: -- but it's not a timeless thing. It is a phenomenon that is very unique to our specific context. That's what -- something that's just, you know, to me, just kind of an interesting tidbit is that Christians in the first century did not practice personal Bible study. Like we feel like that every Christian needs to -- you know, you need to be involved in personal Bible study. Well, I agree with that because we have the benefit of having the Bible in our own language and in a format that we can read, and we tend to be a literate people -- tend to be literate people.

The vast majority, though, of human beings throughout the last 2,000 years of church history have been illiterate, have not had access to the scriptures in their own language, and have not had the ability to mass-produce scripture.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: It was only 500 years ago or so that they had the ability to mass-produce books. Before that you had to be a library, a repository for written material, or you had to be extremely wealthy or you had to be a theologian or something in order to have access to the written word. People didn't have access to the written word.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: And then you have Catholicism that didn't allow -- for a lot of period of history didn't allow the Latin Vulgate to -- or scripture to be translated in any other way than through the Latin Vulgate, and so you had people like Martin Luther that was fighting to have it translated into German; you had people in England that were fighting the Church of England in order to have it translated into English. You had people that died in order to get the scriptures in their native language, and to this day there are people groups around the world, small people groups, small language groups that don't have the scriptures in their own language.

So what do you do? Well, for the most part, for the vast majority of human history, if people were going to be followers of Jesus, they studied the scriptures in community. They studied the scriptures as a group. That shouldn't be surprising to us. We live in a very

hyperindividualistic society that tends to think about our own personal walk with Jesus. Now, I'm not discounting that at all because we cannot have a vicarious faith. I can't say, "Well, you know, I'm part of a church so, obviously, I'm a faithful Christian." It's like, well, no, you need to have a personal faith in the Lord and you need to have your own personal discipleship. You need to follow Jesus personally, but that doesn't mean in isolation. That doesn't mean disconnected from the community of faith.

And you're exactly right. We have to work these questions out together, not individually, not in a sense that says, "Well, hey, listen, you come to your own interpretations; I'll come to my own interpretations." That's never been the way that it works. Scripture was -- in the first century, when a letter came in it wasn't like they said, "Okay. Let's make" -- well, I mean, they did -- they did make copies and they did pass those things around, but it wasn't like they had -- for the first hundred years of church history, it wasn't like every disciple had a collection of the 27 books of the New Testament in their house that they could just personally study on their own, or, for that matter, the 39 books of the Hebrew scriptures. They didn't have access to that. They might have had access to some of it as a church family, as a group, so when they -- "Read me again the letter from Paul." "Read me again the letter from Peter." And so they would read it as a group and they would ask their questions and they would work out all of those questions and thoughts and answers together as a church community.

Now, would people come to different conclusions? Absolutely,

which is where Romans 14 comes into play. And there were differences of what Paul calls "dialogismós," opinions or conclusions to which people came. And so we might read a letter together and you're like, "Well, no, listen, this is the way." And I think, "No, no, Paul is saying this," and we have a difficult time. And Paul says, "Welcome each other. In spite of your differences of dialogismós, in spite of your differences of opinion, welcome each other. Embrace each other as family in spite of the fact that you're not going to see everything the same way." Different cultural backgrounds, different ways of interpreting, different ways of seeing things, so, yeah, there are going to be matters of opinion.

But to your point, the intention of God -- the intention of Jesus was always that we would read the scriptures together as a family and that we would work out our questions together. That's why we have people who have devoted their life to teaching the gospel of Jesus. We have people that have said, "Listen, I'm not going to work a different job because I'm going to devote all of my time and all of my energy to teaching and reading and studying the good news of Jesus and I'm going to devote myself to the proclamation, to the knowing and the proclaiming of this biblical truth." And we have other people that have devoted themselves to being shepherds and we have people that have devoted themselves to being deacons, and, you know, we have all of these people that work together as a collective group to say, "Let's work out all of these questions together as a family." And so you're exactly right. I think, too often, we try to ask our questions personally. Again, there's a place for that.

TRAVIS: Sure.

WES: I'm not saying there's not, but we're very privileged right now in our culture to have a copy of the -- I mean, I have my iPad in my hand that has I don't even know how many translations.

TRAVIS: I think I might be able to read it on my watch if I really wanted to.

WES: He has an Apple watch, just for the listening audience.

But yeah, that's exactly -- and so, I mean, we sometimes forget just how privileged we are. I don't want to say "blessed." I don't want to use the word "blessed" for that. Yeah, I do think it's a blessing, but so were the people that were illiterate who lived, you know, several hundred years ago and were part of a church family where they read the scriptures together as a family. They were blessed, as well. "Blessed are the poor." "Blessed are those that are persecuted." So, yeah, I mean, they were blessed, as well, but we have -- we have a particular opportunity to study the scriptures more and to study the scriptures individually, but it should never take the place of collective study, of collective question-asking and answering, and so you're exactly right. We need to ask those questions, not only of learned and studied individuals, but also together as a family, because even the children bring -- and I say "children" both literally and metaphorically, those that are new in the faith. Some of the best questions that I've ever heard asked are by people that are new to the faith, and I think, man, why do I not ask questions like that? But they ask it because they're looking at it with a fresh set of eyes and so their questions themselves are

enlightening, and so I have a new perspective on the scriptures because they asked this. "Why did David do that?" "Why did Moses do that?" I think, "Why didn't I ever think to ask that question?" But they have this fresh perspective, so it's so important that the young and the old, the studied and the illiterate, all come together and study together and ask these questions together as a family.

I really hope you enjoyed this Bible study and I hope you'll subscribe to hear future episodes of the podcast. A big thank you to Travis Pauley, as well as our McDermott Road church family, for helping to make this podcast possible, and a special thanks to all of you for listening. We love you, God loves you, and we hope you have a wonderful day.