

Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. I hope you enjoy this study.

TRAVIS: All right. Well, welcome back, everybody, to the Bible study podcast. We are in two episodes, I believe, to the new year -- at least that we've recorded in the new year. This will be our second episode. What are we discussing today?

WES: Well, we're going to talk about the Lord's supper, which you wouldn't think would be a controversial topic, but I've found a way to make everything controversial.

TRAVIS: I'm pro-Lord's supper.

WES: Good. I'm glad to know that. That was really the big question of today's episode was is Travis pro or con Lord's supper, but I'm glad to know that we're both on the same page. We're both in favor of communion, or the Lord's supper.

TRAVIS: Good.

WES: But in 2020 I had a conversation -- I was really just trying to encourage people, and I said something about the Lord's supper that ended up causing people to be very upset, disproportionately so, I felt like, but that was 2020; there was all kinds of frustration and anger and people were kind of, you know, on edge about a lot of different things, understandably so. It was a weird year. But now it's 2021 and so we're done with all of the weirdness.

TRAVIS: Thankfully, we've got a fresh start.

WES: Yes. Go back and listen to the series "The myth of the fresh start."

TRAVIS: Yeah.

WES: But I'm sure that 2021 will have -- I think as long as social media exists there will be this kind of situation. This is why I thought maybe the podcast would be a better context, better platform for this discussion because you can hear people's tone of voice, you can kind of insert some nuance and we can talk back and forth about it. But it was right in the middle of a lot of things that were going on last year and, you know, people were on edge. And it was a Saturday night; we were going into Sunday morning, and I really just encouraged people that, as they took the Lord's supper, as they broke the bread and drank the cup -- and we were separated from each other physically. We weren't even meeting in person at the time and so everybody was going to be worshipping in their homes, and I just encouraged people, as you take the bread and you eat it and you drink the cup, remember your brothers and sisters. Think about your brothers and sisters. And I encouraged them to think about people on the other side of these various issues. Think about them when you eat that bread; think about them when you drink that cup. This is your family. You're coming to the table together. Think about them as you do that. I got a lot of pushback from people that said, "No, no, no, Wes, you shouldn't be thinking about people and their problems when you're taking the Lord's supper. You should just be thinking about Jesus." And I get that. I mean, I understand where they're coming from, and we'll talk about I Corinthians 11 because that was the passage that I referenced in my post and also ones that people

referenced in trying to refute me.

But I think about lots of different passages, like Colossians 3, and setting your mind on things above, not on things of the earth, and I don't think there that when Paul encourages people to set their mind on things above, that he means don't think about your brothers and sisters and the problems that they have; don't think about their hunger; don't think about their thirst. He's saying don't have an earthly mind-set; don't have an earthly ambition; don't have an earthly perspective. Think about things the way God thinks about things. Think about things through the lens of the gospel. Think about things as they are in light of the reign of Jesus. That's what it means to be a follower of Jesus is to see the world in light of his reign, to see the visible in light of the invisible, to see earth in light of heaven. Jesus says he is king. He is the one with all authority in heaven and on earth, but from an earthly perspective, it doesn't look that way. It doesn't look like Jesus has all authority, that Jesus is in charge of the world, so we have to learn not to just focus on invisible things, but to see visible things through the light of invisible things, to see the things around us in light of what's going on behind the veil in heaven.

But that's sort of big-picture stuff. That's sort of everyday kind of stuff. What about the Lord's supper? Like what should we think about when we think about the Lord's supper? And not just here at McDermott Road, but every church I've ever been in, and probably the same for you, you know, whenever we take the Lord's supper somebody will get up and will say, "In order to prepare our minds for the Lord's

supper, we're going to do this." Before the Lord's supper we say, "We're doing this to prepare your minds."

So that's the big question, is how should your minds be prepared? For what should they be prepared? What should they be set on? And we often tell people, "Don't think about the things that have been going on all week. Don't think about your kids. Don't think about their -- you know, the way they've been rebellious all week. Don't think about your job. Don't think about the politics. Don't think about all of these things because that's distracting to you. Put out of your mind all of these earthly things and simply think about Jesus and think about his sacrifice." And let me say up front, I'm not against that. I'm not against this mental image of Jesus on the cross when you take the Lord's supper. But it does bring up an interesting point. Is that the only thing that's allowable to be in our mind when we eat the bread and drink the cup is this mental image? I think I grew up thinking that like I had to have this mental image of bloody Jesus on the cross with nails in his hands and blood dripping down his body giving his life for me on the cross. That has to be the mental image that I have in my mind when I eat the bread and drink the cup, and if anything else slips in there and I think about anything else, then I'm doing wrong because I'm supposed to be thinking about his body.

So that brings up I Corinthians 11, where Paul says that. You know, at least that's how it's been taken. So I want us to read I Corinthians 11 in the context and think about what Paul means when he says that anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks

judgment on himself. That's really -- that's verse 29, I Corinthians 11. That's really the linchpin of this conversation. What does he mean by "discern the body"? That's the big question. Because does he mean, like, discern, like think about the body of Jesus on the cross, or is it something else? So let's look at I Corinthians 11, starting in verse 17.

Paul says, "In the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it's not for the better but for the worse." Which, to me, I've got to stop right there and just acknowledge that that's the worst thing that probably anybody has ever said to a church gathering, to an assembly, like it would be better if you didn't come together because when you come together it's not for the better, it's for the worse. You actually make the situation worse by coming together than if you didn't. Like you're not being -- not only are you being not productive, like you're not doing any good, but you're actually worse after coming than you were before. Like that's rough. Like that's a rough thing to say when, obviously, that's reality. So this Corinthian church, their assembly was not for the better, but was for the worse. We just kind of have to sit with that for a second.

And then he says, "For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it's not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of

God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not."

So I think we have to acknowledge what's going -- what Paul is dealing with in this church is not -- is not the fact that their mind is distracted by politics. Right? I mean, he's not dealing with the fact that they're thinking about, you know, their finances, they're thinking about their rebellious teen, they're thinking about whatever. That's not what Paul's dealing with. Now, I'm not saying that should be your focus and your mind-set when you eat the Lord's supper, but that's not the context. That's not what he's dealing with. He's not dealing with distracted people; he's dealing with divided people. That's what we have to acknowledge about this context of this entire book, especially here in Chapter 11. He's dealing with divided Christians, not distracted Christians. It's not that they're just, you know, going through the motions, so to speak. I'm putting that in air quotes but nobody can see me. It's not that they're going through the motions, and most of the time that's what we're trying to deal with. Like don't just go through the motions. Don't just eat this bread and drink this cup and think about like it's --

TRAVIS: Just checking your watch.

WES: Right. You're just checking your watch, you're just trying to get through it. That's not what Paul is dealing with. He's dealing with a divided group of people, that they have divisions and factions, they have different groups within the church. You've got poor people who are showing up and there's nothing left. There's no meal for them. There's

no bread for them. There's no cup for them. They're not sharing it with them. They're not sharing. That's the key here. That's what Paul is dealing with. They're not sharing themselves. They're not sharing the meal. They're not participating in this together. There's no togetherness. There's no sharing. There's no communion. What we mean when we say "communion" is not only that we're communing with God, but we're communing with one another. We're fellowshiping with one another. We're in fellowship with one another. That's what it means to share this bread and to share this cup.

Then he says, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

So yes, yes, yes, yes, hear it a thousand times over, we are doing this in remembrance of Jesus -- in remembrance of Jesus, in remembrance of what Jesus did, of him giving his body and shedding his blood, so if it's done in not a memorial way, then it's wrong. But why -- why was what they were doing not in remembrance of Jesus? It's specifically, contextually, based on what Paul is actually saying -- it's because they're divided. That's why it wasn't in remembrance of him. You're not remembering Jesus if you're being divided in this coming together. If

you're coming together and you have factions and divisions and separations, then this is not honoring Jesus. This is not remembering Jesus. This isn't a memorial of Jesus if you're doing the very opposite of what Jesus intended to happen.

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together -- together -- to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I'll give directions when I come."

And then he goes on, in the very next verse -- and, again, you know, I mean, originally it wasn't broken down into chapters and verses, but the very next verse he begins to say, "Concerning spiritual gifts," and then he talks about all these things, and in that same context he says, in verse 12 of the next chapter, Chapter 12, he says, "Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into

one body -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and all were made to drink of one Spirit."

So when Paul says that we do this, we discern the body, or that we should discern the body, what does he mean by "body"? Does he mean the body and blood of the Lord or does he mean the body as in the body of Jesus that is made up of all of the followers of Jesus? Well, most commentaries -- commentators, and I agree, think he means both. It's both. He's tying those together. He's saying this is how you honor and discern the body is by sharing this blood, this cup, and this bread in remembrance of Jesus. You are doing this together in remembrance of him and discerning the body. You're recognizing the body. You're recognizing not only the body of Jesus that died on the cross, but the body of Jesus that's made up of all of us.

And you say, Wes, I think maybe you're going too far. You're taking it out of context. Well, again, I read Chapter 12 that is all about that idea of all of the humans, the people, making up the body of Christ, but then even before he brings the subject up in Chapter 10. Look at Chapter 10, verse 16, and here he's talking about sharing in idolatrous feasts and meals and participating in these idolatrous meals. And he says in Chapter 10 and verse 16, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? And the bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." This is before he brings up what he says in I Corinthians 11. So is he saying "a participation in the body of Christ," verse 16, and then he says, "we are

one body, for we all partake of the one bread" -- is he talking about the body as in the church or the body as in the body of Jesus? And the answer is yes, it's both. We're -- this is about Jesus and it's about Jesus' people.

And so when we come together we are discerning the body and thinking about the body. Does that mean we think about the death of Jesus? Yes. Jesus hanging bloody on the cross? Yes. But also each other. That's why the communion is not an individual act; it is a community act. In fact, there's a lot of people that really struggle with this right now, especially during the pandemic. Can you take the Lord's supper by yourself? Can you take the Lord's supper when you're at home by yourself, or should you only take it when you're gathered together with other people? Well, I tend to believe that even when we are gathered in a small group -- and even on a regular Sunday here at McDermott Road you've got 500 people in a room, that's a small group compared to all of the Christians. Paul is saying in I Corinthians 10, when you go down to the pagan temple and you participate in that meal, you are being one body with them. You are joining yourself to that group by participating in that meal, and when you join yourself to the body of Jesus and you share this bread and you share this cup, you are one body with us. So you've got to choose because you can't have it both ways. You can't go join yourself with them and join yourself with us. And so when you share this bread and you drink this cup, you are sharing yourself. You are becoming one body with the people of Jesus.

And so I tend to believe that when 500 people share the bread and

the cup, there are also 5 million people -- there are millions of people all over the world that we are participating with and that we are all gathered -- "virtually" takes on a different meaning right now. We are gathered virtually around the world on the first day of the week celebrating what Jesus has done and who we are in Jesus, and we're doing it together, participating together. So I do think that if I'm at home sick or there's a pandemic or there's a snowstorm, or whatever, I do believe that I can take it with my family or whatever and participate virtually with everyone else, but I think it has the potential to be wrong if I don't do it discerning both the body of Jesus on the cross and the body of Christ of which I'm a participant, of which I'm a part. And if I just do it thinking about myself and my own personal salvation, I think that's problematic based on what Paul is saying. It's not about Jesus saving me as much as it is Jesus saving us, and this is something that we are in communion, in community, with. We are in community with Jesus and we are in community with one another. Even beyond community -- that doesn't even go far enough. Like to say we're one family with each other is one thing, but to say we're one body with each other is something intimate. That's a good word. It is -- it's an intimate act.

And so I do think that saying when you come together and you share this bread and you drink this cup, yes, think about Jesus and what he's done, absolutely, and if you don't think about Jesus and what he's done, that's a problem. But if you come to the table not caring that your brothers and sisters are hurting, not caring that your brothers and sisters are poor, not caring that your brothers and sisters don't have

enough food, not caring that your brother and sister is carrying a heavy burden, that's a problem, as well. And coming to a table -- and, again, we have a hard time with this because we tend to think of the communion as a -- you know, about a five- or ten-minute thing, you know, where you take a little pinch of cracker and you drink a little swig of juice rather than this might take a while because we're breaking bread and drinking cup together as a family and we're sharing this time and we are sharing ourselves because we not only celebrate the body of Jesus on the cross and the body of Jesus that's been raised, but we celebrate the body of Jesus of which we are now a part, and that discernment of recognizing the body of Jesus in both what he's done for us, and now what we are a part of, is part of the communion meal.

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TRAVIS: As we're just talking about the Lord's supper and what we think about, like what I typically think about -- and I've started to see it goes in phases. When I was in high school I thought a lot about like the moments surrounding Jesus' death. I would think about the dichotomy between Judas and Peter, that they both turn their backs on him but their stories end very differently. Nowadays, the last several years, I

think a lot -- I don't even get to the crucifixion. I'm always thinking about Jesus in the garden and Jesus -- and what he's -- you know, as he's contemplating this decision, and I think it's, you know, it's the most compelling thing -- it's -- I mean, at least right now, to me, it is the most compelling thing I've ever heard of somebody contemplating their own crucifixion, contemplating allowing it.

And I think -- you know, I don't mean this as pushback in any way, more as just kind of where I'm at, and I was at this before the pandemic, before things became virtual, and I would say I'm just more sunken into it now, and that is it's -- for me it's a very individualistic practice in terms of the actual supper itself. But I've always sort of had a sense -- and I think a lot about the church I attended growing up and a certain period where there was a lot of division and how walking into the building was -- you know, I mean, even in high school sort of prepping myself, sort of like, you know, doing one of those -- just prepping, and I wasn't the only one doing that. But the Lord's supper was a time where I could -- you know, at my worst, I could love my brothers and sisters during that because I could appreciate, even if it was just in a passing thought, not the thing I contemplated or thought about during the time, it was at least a time where I could remind myself we're all here to do this.

And in a way, you know, in those moments where it's difficult to be at church, to be united, like I want to unite around Jesus but it's hard to do it with you, you know, in those moments, there's -- I appreciate thinking about Jesus because he makes me humble and, you know, like right now

I think a lot about the garden and I think about the humility that God had to have to be kneeling in the garden. His followers can't keep awake. You know, they can't even stay awake a little longer in light of what's coming. He knows that one of his followers is coming to do him in, and maybe in that time he's deciding how he's going to greet him. "I'm going to greet him as a friend." You know, he says, "I'm going to greet that guy, Judas, who's going to betray -- I'm going to greet him as a friend." I think about that during the Lord's supper time. That helps me get a little distance from the division, the things that separate us, because whether your church is going through a period or not of division, like there's always going to be things that separate us.

WES: Oh, absolutely, yeah.

TRAVIS: I mean, my own personal sin will separate us if nothing else does. Our own personal sin will do that.

WES: And I think that that's exactly what Paul has in mind when he talks in I Corinthians 11 about examining yourself is to examine -- and that's what the table -- and I'm so glad you brought that up because that's what the table should do. In fact, it should challenge our divisions to the point where you either have to participate or get out. Where you can't -- you can't come in, be divided, take the food, and then go and be divided again. Like you should come in divided --

TRAVIS: There has to be a change.

WES: -- and then leave united. Like the table should unite us. That's the whole point. That's what Jesus prayed. You know, you brought up the garden. Jesus prayed what we call the high priestly prayer in John 17

that we might be one, even as he and the Father are one. This oneness is supposed to happen around the table. This is what -- and I think we recognize this. Unfortunately, we recognize this with other meals. Like we recognize that it's hard to treat somebody horribly after you have dinner with them. Like you sit down to dinner with somebody and you have a dinner for an hour and then you walk away and you're like, "I kind of didn't like that guy before, but, you know what? He's kind of growing on me." That's what the table should do for us. It should bring us together. It should unite us and, yeah, not focus on our divisions, but focus on laying down our own self for the sake of unity. That's what it means to follow Jesus, and if that's what it means to follow Jesus, then that's especially what we should be thinking about at the table. And so the table should bring together both the zealot, Simon the zealot, and Matthew the tax collector and bring them together at the table to say we left those lives and now this is a life of being one body. That body, that oneness, that one body.

That's where -- you know, it's interesting there's a whole group of people -- a whole group of churches within churches of Christ that believe in one loaf and one cup and they believe that every assembly should have one loaf and one cup, and I agree with that in philosophy. I agree with that, you know, metaphorically. I think that that's what Paul says in I Corinthians 10, but I believe that there is one loaf, period. There is one loaf universal. There is one cup universal, and we are all sharing that cup and regardless if we're in the same congregation. Congregation isn't necessarily where unity should begin or end. It's

awful when there's division even within a congregation, but there should be unity universal amongst all followers of Jesus, and that when we break this bread and drink this cup we ought to be reflecting on the unity that Jesus desires and it should challenge those divisions. It should break down those divisions, and that's what Paul says. You leave just as divided. It's for the worse. In fact, you not only leave just as divided, you leave more divided. Your coming together to break the bread and drink the cup isn't resulting in unity, it's resulting in further division and you're breaking it even worse.

And so -- and, again, and this goes back to what we talked about last week, that if we tend to think about the end result -- like what's the telos? What's the goal of Christianity? What's the goal of what we're trying to accomplish? If the goal is personal individual holiness, sanctification, salvation, that's one thing. But if the goal is, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 1:10, to unite all things in heaven and on earth -- if the goal is Jesus, is unity, oneness, bringing together, breaking down the wall of hostility between Jews and the nations, the Gentiles, bringing them together into one body and creating one new man, how Paul puts it in Galatians and Ephesians, this idea of making one new man -- where there were many, or where there were two, making one new man, one body, then we might think, you know what? If the goal isn't just my salvation, I get to go to heaven, my sins are forgiven, but the goal of Jesus, like his intention was to make me holy so that he could make me part of the body, what I tend to say is that we tend to think that unity -- that the goal of unity is salvation when actually it's the other way

around. The goal of salvation is unity. We tend to think, "I need to get along with Travis so that I can get saved, so that I can be saved, so that I can go to heaven," when, in reality, it's, "Jesus saved me so that Travis and I can be one," and that changes the way that I come to the table. If I come to the table thinking Jesus saved me so that I can participate in this meal with Travis, so that I can participate in this meal with them, with these other people that I've spent all week, you know, not being real nice to and kind of having bitterness in my heart towards, and I was kind of angry with this person, and that person said such-and-such, but Jesus saved me so that we could be one, Jesus laid down his life so that we could be one, and I need to examine myself. And, again, we tend to make that very individual, like are my sins separating me from God? Is God mad at me because something I did this week? It's like, yeah, that's a good question. But another question is, am I at odds with my brother or sister? And, again, Jesus says if you remember somebody has something against you and you're offering your gift at the altar, leave it there and go and be reconciled. For Jesus, reconciliation and unity is the goal. That's the end goal. That's not just a part of the journey -- and that's what we tend to think of it as, you know, unity and reconciliation, oh, those are good things if you can achieve those on your way to heaven, but it's like, no, no, no, it's you're saved so that you can be one. This is the goal, is oneness and unity, being one body, Jesus bringing us all into one new humanity, one body. This is the intention from the very beginning to the very end. This is the goal.

And the Lord's supper, the communion -- I love that word

"communion" because it's all about fellowship. It's all about sharing. Then if that's the big-picture goal of Christianity, then that becomes this pinnacle moment every week where we reflect not only on what Jesus did for me personally -- yes, of course -- but now what I get to be a part of. And, again, I'll read again what Paul says because I just love this from I Corinthians 10. He says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are, one body for we all partake of the one bread." Again -- and Paul is writing this from somewhere else to the Corinthians and saying, "Every time we break this bread." There's one bread. We're all taking the one bread.

"Consider the people of Israel: Are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I don't want you to be participants with demons." His whole point is that when you take a meal with someone you are participating, not only with those other people, but also with their God, or, in this case, with their demons. And when you take the bread, the one bread and the one cup, you are participating not only with God, but with each other. We who are many are one body. And so it's so incredibly important.

Now, I don't think that means -- and I love what you were saying about like what all have we thought about? Because we get the opportunity to do this weekly, right? I mean, there could be a million

things to think about, and I don't want us to think, well, I have to think about all of those things, like there's this checklist. But it's like I think that we need to not disallow ourselves from thinking about the hard things during communion because that's what Christianity is.

Christianity is the hard things, and it's learning to look at the scene through the lens of the unseen. It's learning to see the visible in light of the invisible, to see our brothers and sisters through the lens of the gospel, to say Jesus died so that we could be one, and I cannot share this bread with them and drink this cup with them and then leave divided if it's within my power to be reconciled to them because that's the goal of my salvation. That's why Jesus gave his life. That's why Jesus shed his blood so that we could all be part of the one body, and that's why we're sharing this meal.

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.