

Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast

A Conversation on Vertical and Horizontal Reconciliation

Travis: All right, everybody. Welcome back to the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast, where here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. I'm Travis Pauley, here as always, with Wes McAdams. Hi, Wes.

Wes: Hey, Brother.

Travis: How are you?

Wes: I'm good. How are you?

Travis: I'm great. I'm excited to be doing this again.

Wes: Yeah.

Travis: We've had one episode so far.

Wes: I feel like I should ask you, so how was your break? Like as if we didn't see each other every day.

Travis: Yeah, exactly.

Wes: As if we weren't doing other things this whole time.

Travis: Right. We just took a little break, but now we're back, and we have a topic today where I'm going to sort of -- I don't want to say interrogate you --

Wes: No, this is good.

Travis: -- but I have a lot of questions for you on something we've been discussing.

Wes: Yeah. You asked me a question the other day, and I was like, do that on the podcast.

Travis: Yeah, let's do it on the podcast.

Wes: Yeah. We don't have enough of that.

Travis: And it was on the topic of -- you preached a while back here at McDermott on the topic of reconciliation, and you talked about this idea of reconciling horizontally with people and then reconciling vertically with God. And you said something -- and I want to hear you kind of -- for the podcast, kind of get into your thoughts on this, but you said -- you kind of equated the two, like they're --

Wes: Do you want me to read the exact quote?

Travis: I'd love for you to read the exact quote.

Wes: I wrote it down so that I would -- yep. I said the gospel is as much about reconciling people with one another as it is reconciling people with God.

Travis: Right. That felt too much like an interrogation for me to read back the exact quote, but if you're going to do it... No, and I think, to your point, you read the gospels and, obviously, that's a big deal. That's so much of what Jesus himself is doing, what he's getting his disciples to start doing. I mean, the very disciples he chose needed reconciliation with each other from the very get-go, just from their backgrounds. And you think about Matthew being a tax collector and how that would have ruffled a lot of feathers with the other followers of Jesus.

So I definitely saw that part of it, but I wanted to ask, like, in terms of equating the two types of reconciliation -- one with people and one with God -- do you see them as truly equal, as, you know, like one -- they have to go together; they have to -- there's no hierarchy between them? I guess that's kind of where my question started.

Wes: I think that's a good question, and I don't know that I can answer whether or not there's a hierarchy, and that's why I phrased it the way that I did in the sermon, was that the gospel is as much about one as it is the other. Not to say necessarily that one is as always as important as the other, although I think that case could be made, as well, but specifically, we were talking -- the sermon was about the unity of people groups, of ethnicities, of God bringing all people together in Christ.

And so, specifically to that point, the gospel -- and when we say "the gospel," there's so much -- and I think that, in and of itself -- I don't know that we've done a series on the podcast, but I know I've done a series of blog posts on "What is the gospel?" I should probably link to that in the show notes. But that idea of "what is the gospel" is so important because I think that for so many of us -- and this is why this point needed to be made in the sermon -- and I'm glad we're talking about it today -- because we tend to think about the gospel as getting saved, as vertical reconciliation, as my sins getting washed away, whereas that's not at all -- that's a part of it, for sure, but that's -- that would be entirely reductionistic to think of the gospel purely in those terms, in terms of someone personally getting saved. The gospel is about Jesus reigning, Jesus being king.

In fact, we just finished a series on Matthew, and that's what the gospel of Matthew is all about. It's all about God reigning as king through Jesus, that God is bringing about his uncontested rule and reign in the world through King Jesus. So if I had to sum up what is the gospel, that's how I would sum it up, that God is bringing his uncontested rule and reign through Jesus of Nazareth, that he is God's anointed king.

And then Jesus spends many parables, many lessons describing what does the kingdom of God look like? What does it mean to be part of the kingdom of God? What is accomplished by God ruling and reigning through King Jesus? And then all of the letters that Paul writes and Peter write and John write, and all of these apostles write -- they're all about that. What does the kingdom of God look like? What does it look like if God is ruling and reigning through King Jesus? What reality is brought to bear on the world? And yes, that vertical reconciliation is part of that, that I have been reconciled to God. But just as much a part of that is the reconciliation that's been brought about to all kinds of different issues, and even that -- we even could zoom out further.

We could say this is what it looks like when God -- when his rule and reign is reestablished over the people, over not just Israel, but over all peoples. What does it look like when God's rule and reign is reestablished over the nations? Well, even that idea is -- well, when we say "reestablished," what do we mean? Like when was his rule and reign not established? Well, we would go all the way back to the Garden, and when we see the fall of mankind, we see the brokenness. We see the -- "enmity" I think is a good word -- the enmity that the fall brought about, not just vertically, but also horizontally. And not just even horizontally, but even with the ground itself. So after the fall, there was -- before that, there was harmony and unity between God and humans, between Adam and Eve, between humanity and humanity, but also between humanity and the ground and creation and the animals.

And so if God's rule and reign is being reestablished over all peoples,

then what we would expect to see is that everything is being brought back into harmony. Everything is being brought back into unity. Yes, between God and humans, but also between humans and one another, and what Paul lays out in Romans 8, that eventually the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption. So all of the enmity will be taken away when God's rule and reign is reestablished in all of creation.

And so what we see in the church -- or what we should see in the church is this is what it looks like, in the present, for God's rule and reign to be reestablished in us, that we are reconciled, not only with God, but also with each other.

Travis: Yeah. So I guess there's a couple different ways that I've thought about kind of like applying this issue of reconciling with people and why that's so complicated. Because, obviously, I mean, that was kind of the point of the series you were doing, is that it is complicated.

Wes: It's complicated. It's messy, yeah.

Travis: And reconciling with God, while I wouldn't say it's easy, there's one part that's easier, and that's God.

Wes: Yeah, yeah.

Travis: God is, you know --

Wes: He's not fickle like people are.

Travis: He's going to keep his side of the covenant. And with people, there's misunderstandings, there's miscommunications, there's -- I was thinking about just in terms of Christendom, the difficulty in reconciling Christians to one another is, well, how do you define "Christian"? How do you define "salvation"? How do you define devotion to Jesus? How do you

define the lifestyle that a Christian should live? And so without even getting too specific about, you know, what doctrinal issues or what -- the issue of how can I be reconciled to people when they don't want to be reconciled with me, when there are specific things that are standing between us, and the fact that it's always going to take two to tango. There's not one side that's sure to keep the covenant as there is in the vertical reconciliation. What do you think about that?

Wes: I mean, it's such a great question, and it's exactly -- I mean, so many passages come to my mind when you say that. I think about -- one of the things that I thought about, even just in the beginning as we think about this idea of -- you put it in terms of "equating." Jesus put it this way, and this is radical, to use our word, but Matthew 5, in the Sermon on the Mount -- and I think that's what so much of this conversation comes down to is the Sermon on the Mount. What does it look like to be citizens of this reconciled kingdom and this kingdom who is trying to be reconciled with God and with one another? The Sermon on the Mount, like, live that out. And if anyone -- well, we'll talk about if anyone doesn't, but that's what we should all be striving to do, is live out the Sermon on the Mount.

But part of that, Matthew 5, starting in verse 21, he says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; and whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says 'You fool' will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there

before the altar and go." And I love these words: "First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."

I love those words, "First be reconciled." That even prioritizes the horizontal reconciliation over offering a gift to God. And you might think, wow, Jesus is prioritizing the horizontal over the vertical in some ways because -- and it goes back to everything the prophets told Israel, that if you are ignoring these human relationships because they're too messy, because they're too hard, because you are stuck in your ways, you want to do things your way, then that ignoring of this, it negates the vertical. And so our vertical worship is no substitution for horizontal love and kindness and mercy and justice.

But to your point, what if people -- what if I'm doing what I'm supposed to and the other party isn't? Well, I think Paul would say things like, "Do whatever you can," or, "As far as it depends on you, live at peace with all men." So yes, there is an extent to which reconciliation is only possible when it's one-anothered, and that's one of the reasons that reciprocal phrase is used so often in the New Testament, because Christianity is not just an individual type of an exercise. It is a reciprocal type of communal relationship where we're living this out together in community, where there's no way for me to practice the one-anothers except with one another. There's no way for me to practice this except with other people. And so all of these

commandments that are given to us, I can only play one part of it, and it's going to require that someone else reciprocate that.

But it's like I say with my boys every night before bed. My wife and I have had this routine of saying, amongst other things, "Do what's right, no matter what," and one of the things we mean by that is, "It doesn't matter what someone else does; you do the right thing." And so the things like the fruit of the Spirit, love and joy and peace and patience, these things are not contingent upon other people doing their part, that I'm always called to display and manifest the fruit of the Spirit whether or not someone else does. Now, in order for reconciliation to happen, in order for unity to happen, then it has to be reciprocated. I don't have to have someone else do the right thing in order for me to do the right thing, but in order for us to have unity, we're both going to have to be determined to do the right thing. And just like the vertical relationship requires repentance, repentance has to be a part of this horizontal reconciliation, too. I cannot be reconciled with someone who is persevering -- who is set on, bent on doing the wrong thing.

And I think that that's where conversations around church discipline -- you think about passages like Matthew 18, where Jesus lays out what do you do in the situation where someone has sinned against you. In this passage of Matthew 5, he's talking about if you know that someone has something against you; in other words, you've done something wrong, or at least in their mind you've done something wrong, you go and you be reconciled to them. Now, what if someone has done something against you? In other words, you have something against them? It's the other way around. What do you do in that case? Well, you go to them. So either way, Jesus has

given us the initiative. Like it's my responsibility -- if I know, oh, I hurt Travis, or Travis feels like I hurt him, it's my responsibility to go to Travis. But if Travis has hurt me, it's still my responsibility to go to Travis, so I have to take responsibility either way to try to repair the relationship.

And so Jesus says, "If somebody sinned against you, go to them one-on-one and talk it out with them. And if they repent, then you've won your brother. Like that's the goal. And if they don't, then take witnesses with you so that everything can be established on the basis of two or three witnesses. And so -- and if you follow that passage out, ultimately, the person in the scenario doesn't repent of their wrongdoing, and so they're disciplined and they're treated like a tax collector or a Gentile. And that has to be part of the conversation, that the reconciliation that the gospel brings about, both vertically and horizontally, requires repentance. It can't be that we live in unity with God or unity with each other and continue to go about things our own way. Well, what does the way of Jesus look like? Again, Sermon on the Mount. Like, it tells us what that looks like.

Travis: When you were saying -- you brought up the point about leave your gift at the altar if you remember your brother has something against you. One of the things that reminded me of was the passage Jesus loved to quote in Hosea, "I desire mercy more than sacrifice." Sacrifice has always been this big deal ever since Noah, you know, making sacrifices to God, and yet God is saying the mercy part of it, that -- the implication there is to your brother, to the people in your life. And then that reminds me of when Jesus talks about, you know, "There will be many who say to me on that final day, 'Lord, Lord,' who will not enter the kingdom of Heaven," and how, you

know, when he talks to the group that aren't going to make it, "You didn't -- you know, I was naked and you didn't clothe me. I was hungry and you didn't feed me." And they say, "We never saw you hungry or naked." He says, "Well, you didn't do it to the least of these; you didn't do it to me."

And so I think that, like, to your point, that idea of -- obviously, you get through the gospel -- you get through the Sermon on the Mount, the reconciliation with people, the showing love to other people -- which reminds me of another passage we can talk about in a second, is how -- is one of the primary ways you're going to exercise your faith in God, because outside of that time and that one being that was here physically for 30-something years, we don't physically -- we're not in a physical space with God, so who do we show our love for God to? To other people, to the least of these.

Wes: To the image-bearers of God.

Travis: And that calls to mind the passage of the greatest commandment: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself." And I did a little bit of research on that passage, and speaking of that idea of image-bearers -- it was interesting. I found the Greek word for -- when he says "it's like it," is it's -- I think, if I'm understanding the translation correctly, it was "it's in its likeness," which makes me think about how we're made in the likeness of God. We're not God, but we're made to be image-bearers of him. And so I think a lot about that passage, and I think this is where my initial confusion in the way you put the conversation about reconciliation between God and people being, you know, just as important to

the gospel, is I know, from people in my life, and then I know from my growing faith and maturity in Christ, that I have to be right with God before I can be right with other people. And I've seen that in times like -- you know, we've been talking about church discipline and Christian discipline. You know, if you're going to be -- if you're going to continue like this, if we can't find reconciliation, then I have to -- then I can't fellowship with you. I can't -- you know, I can't condone your lifestyle. I can't -- I've had people in my life put that on the line with me, like you need to understand that we're having a problem as Christian brothers and sisters and you need to change something. And then I've seen people, you know, from the outside looking in do that.

The reason they're able to do that is because they have first and foremost in their minds being right with God and for their brother to be right with God. But what it always comes back to, to go all the way back to the ten commandments, is putting God first so that you can love people. You know, I think of I John 4 where he talks about if you know God, you know love. If you know -- if you love, then you know God, that it always comes back to Yahweh. It always comes back to Jehovah, to Jesus being on the throne, and that means that I can love you.

Now, again, I don't think -- you know, I think it would be, on the one hand, very easy to use that as an excuse and say, well, my relationship's right with God, but I can't get along with anybody else, which is, I think, so much the point that you were making. On the other hand, where I kind of like, you know, tense up a little bit is making reconciliation with people -- having an ill-defined relationship with where reconciliation with people comes from

is -- it seemed to me to open the door to equating it to saying -- to putting human relationships -- because, you know, I know, in myself, I'm so weak. I want to go along to get along. I don't like conflict. The thing that makes me engage with it when I see something wrong, the thing that I know has made others engage with it in me when they've seen something wrong is that being right with God is first and foremost important to them and to me, when I'm in the right head space, when I'm thinking right spiritually, and that allows me to pursue reconciliation with people. What do you think about that?

Wes: I think -- and, again, that's why it comes back to that phrase -- not that that phrase comes from scripture, but the way that -- the way I think we have to think about it is, again, the gospel is as much about one as the other, and it really is even borne out in the incarnation because it is what Jesus does for us, that both are something that Jesus does, that his rule and reign brings about, that I don't bring about my reconciliation with God. Like I don't bring about a good relationship with God by doing right things. I don't bring about a right relationship with God by putting him first. God brings about a right relationship with me because he loves me and gave his son to die for me. It's Jesus who brings about a right relationship with me.

I think human religion -- the tendency of human religion of all kinds, just the natural bent that we have towards religious thought and religious ideas, is that if I worship God and I put God first and I think about God and I love God and I worship God, then I'll bring about a right relationship with him, and in the end, that's futile. We can't bring that about. It's that Jesus brings about a right relationship with God, and that in bringing about that relationship, he also brings about a right relationship with others, because in

the same way, I can't -- to your point, I can't bring about right relationships with the people around me. The only way I can is if I'm in fellowship with God. And, again, I can't bring about fellowship with God. Only God can bring about fellowship with himself through the reconciler, Jesus, and he's doing all of that work simultaneously.

And so the way the apostles would put it is that we all tend to want this vertical relationship, but we can't have that without the simultaneous reconciliation with the people around us, which is why Paul got so bent out of shape in Galatians -- or he writes about the way he got bent out of shape in Antioch with Peter when he's writing to the churches in Galatia. He said, "Peter came and he was, you know, all good with eating with his Gentile brothers until these other people showed up from Jerusalem, and then he started to withdraw." And Paul told Peter that he was condemned because he was being a hypocrite. And so it wasn't that Peter stopped worshipping God or even, in his mind, stopped putting God first, but the fact that he wasn't walking in step with the gospel. And that's the way Paul puts it, that he was not in step with the gospel. Being in step with the gospel is allowing Jesus, not us -- it's not that we're pursuing reconciliation; it's that Jesus is pursuing reconciliation with us, each other, and God all simultaneously. And if we say, hey, I want the vertical but I don't really want the horizontal, or it's not worth all the work, then we can't have the vertical.

Here's a passage that I love to think about in I John 4. When I say I love to think about it, I mean, it's like you said, it's hard, it's messy. John says, "We love because he first loved us." I mean, even that -- like to go back to what we were saying, we think, well, I love God. Like I want to put

God first. And it's like, no, the only reason you love God is because he took the initiative in sending his son; otherwise, we wouldn't -- we couldn't have that reconciliation or that relationship. "If anyone says, 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

And so it -- again, I think we have to think of it as a simultaneous thing, that God is doing this work through Jesus, and the work that Jesus is doing is both horizontal and vertical. And yes -- to your point, yes, I can only have that horizontal relationship when I understand the vertical relationship, if by "vertical" we mean not just with the Father, but with the Son, also. But, again, I think that's why it's so important to understand the incarnation, that Jesus himself is both God and man.

I just want to take a short break from our Bible study to tell you that if you are enjoying this discussion, you might also enjoy my book "Beyond the Verse." You can find the audio version of the book at RadicallyChristian.com/audible. If you're not already an Audible subscriber, you can actually get my book for free when you sign up for a free trial, so go to RadicallyChristian.com/audible. Now back to the Bible study.

Wes: As we talk about that idea of Jesus -- and I think "simultaneous" is the way that I would put it. And, again, this is a work of Jesus, what Jesus is doing. And, again, I think if we try to put it in which of those two should I prioritize, or what order should I put it in, I think, again, just that -- that puts us in the driver's seat, whereas I think the gospel turns everything around

and says, Wes, you are broken. You are sinful, and either one of those two things is only by the work of God through Jesus. And when Jesus is doing that, you have to cooperate and participate both in the horizontal and in the vertical.

And I think a great passage that bears that out is Ephesians 2, and Paul there specifically is speaking of this multiethnic church that God is, through Jesus, putting together, bringing together the Jews and the Gentiles. He says in Ephesians 2, starting in verse 11, "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands -- remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." So there he speaks both to the disconnection vertically with God, but also horizontally disconnected from Israel, disconnected from the promises and the -- he calls it the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise. Verse 13, "But now" -- and I always love the "but now" verses. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near" -- there's the reconciliation -- "brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."

And, really, I mean, if we want to get right down to it, the way Paul even puts it there is that he reconciles us horizontally and then brings us

vertically to the Father, that Jesus is reconciling us to one another and then bringing us as a reconciled one man -- the Jews and the Gentiles, two men, two kinds of people, and then brings them together as one and then presents them unified in himself to the Father as one reconciled people. And so -- and I don't think that should mean that the horizontal should be placed in front of, or whatever, the vertical, but, again, I think we just tend to think so individually about it all. We tend to think about I get my relationship -- like I get my ducks in a row with God, and then I can get my ducks in a row with people. And, again, I think that that puts us in the driver's seat, whereas Paul takes that out of it altogether. John does, as well, and says, "We love because he first loved us," and so we love God because he loved us. And if we say we love God, we've got those ducks in a row. I'm just working on -- he says, no, no. If you love God, you also love your brothers, and if you don't love your brothers, you're a liar because you don't really love God. Again, to your point, that's hard. That's really hard to love people, because it seems like God is easy to love and that people are harder to love.

But in reality, often the God that we say we love is the God of our own imagination, and the real true God is loved -- as you pointed out, Matthew Chapter 25. The God that is real, the God that is borne out in the person of Jesus, that God is loved when we show love to one another. And if we don't show love to one another, then we don't really love the God that is. And if we say we love the God that is but we don't love people who are made in his image, then our confession of love to God is a lie, because, again, we're loving a God of our own imagination. That God -- that God, the God of our own imagination, is really easy to love because that God is

whatever we say he is. He never disagrees with us. He never tells us we're wrong. So we can say we love that God, but Jesus says, and the apostles say, the proof of that, the proof of our confessed love for God is seen in our love for one another, and so to sort of try to isolate one from the other is, I think, where we go wrong.

When we say, well, this is more important or -- I'm motioning, so only the people on the video can see it. When we say -- and here's where I think this applies and where I think it's so important, that we have really religious people that are really focused on the ceremony and the ritual and they're in church every time the doors are open and they study their Bible every day and they pray a lot and they're doing all of these religious things, but they can't seem to get along with other people and they're always trying to find a new church because people at that church are making them mad, or eventually they end up just worshipping by themselves because they just can't get along with or be in fellowship with other people. Nobody is good enough for them. That person needs to hear that the gospel is just as much about our horizontal relationships as it is our vertical relationships, but so does the person who thinks that Christianity is only about doing good in the world and being kind and being nice to people, and there's a lot of that, too. In fact, today there may be more of that, where people prioritize the doing of good. "Well, I don't really -- I don't go to church. I don't pray. I don't read my Bible." There's no theology there. There's no understanding, and so they are relying on their own good works. And, again, on both ends of that spectrum, it's a misunderstanding of the gospel that Jesus -- that God in Jesus is reconciling us to one another and with himself simultaneously, and

any rejection of either of those dimensions of the gospel is a walking out of step with it. If it's just to say, "Hey, God made me a social justice warrior and I'm going to do lots of good things in the world. I don't really care about theology. I don't really care about doctrine," well, then you're not relying on Jesus to reconcile you to God. You're hoping that your good works reconcile you with God and reconcile you with your neighbor, and that's not the gospel.

Nor is it the gospel that if I read my Bible every day and I say lots of prayers and I go to church every time the doors are open, but I don't do any good for my neighbor or for my brothers and sisters and I'm not generous and I'm not kind and I'm not self-sacrificial, that's not the gospel, either. The gospel is this total change of who we are and how we live in the world and what we think about and what we do. It's both -- and that's the thing, is that the biblical narrative paints us as a whole person, not as -- as some say, not as a brain on a stick and not just as doers of good. We are mental and we are emotional and we are physical. We are all of those things. We are not just a spirit who happens to have a meat carrier that carries us around. We are a whole person, and the things that we do in the flesh, the things that we do for other people in the world, that really matters. And what we think about and how we pray and how we orient ourselves towards God, that really matters, and we can't really have one without the other.

Travis: Two thoughts that have been springing to mind. One is fear. You talked about -- you know, and I definitely agree that -- I was having images of my own life flash before my eyes of what my conception of God was at different points and, you know, one of the things that -- you know, you said

the God of our imagination. It's like one of the things that makes him really easy to love when he's just the merciful, sort of hippy --

Wes: Heavenly Santa Claus.

Travis: Exactly. Heavenly Santa Claus. I like that. Well, that's not -- you're leaving out a lot of fear that should come with your relationship with God. But then I think one of the troubles that we come into, as I keep aiming up and I keep aiming, hopefully, at a better conception of God -- which, as you've been pointing out, oftentimes I figure that out in relationship to other people. One of the things that makes the loving of God -- like, actually, my fear of God is part of my love now. It's not -- I don't love God in spite of the fear, in spite of the judgment. It's actually because of the judgment, because God's judgment calls me to a better way, to a better walk, to a better life, to treating others better. The difference between that fear -- and a little aside here. I know we don't want to go down this rabbit hole, maybe, but I've always heard people talk about, like, well, fear of the Lord is more like respect, and as I've studied that and thought about that, I'm like, I think it's fear. I think it's a holy fear of the one who can destroy both body and soul.

Wes: I think that's true -- that's true for disobedience, and I think the way John is putting it is that if you -- because he says, "Perfect love casts out fear." And so while fear is the beginning of wisdom and is the beginning of God drawing us to himself -- and you're right; it's more than our English word "respect" conveys that it is. I mean, every time somebody in scripture comes into contact with God in some sort of a theophany, they fall on their face. They are terrified. But the God who reveals himself through Jesus,

that love of God through Jesus, it casts out that fear because John says fear has to do with punishment, but perfect love casts out fear. So we eventually get to the point in our relationship with him that if we are living obediently, then we have no need to be afraid in that sense. That there's still that respect, but it's -- that fear becomes like the fear of a healthy marriage, where I fear disappointing my wife; I don't fear that she's going to leave me, because I'm not doing anything that would cause her to leave me. I'm not doing anything that would cause God to punish me. It's those who act disobediently who ought to be afraid, and there are times when -- the Hebrew writer spends the entire book trying to drive the fear of God into their hearts because they need to be afraid because they're on the precipice of rebellion.

Travis: I think about Revelation in a very similar sense.

Wes: Absolutely.

Travis: And that's Christ coming, and he has a sword. He has, you know --

Wes: Going to remove their candlestick, yeah, and cast into the lake of fire, yeah.

Travis: So I think about that fear being very differently -- I like what you said, like it's -- in right covenant relationship, it's a different -- it's not fear of punishment.

Wes: Yeah, it matures. It's a matured fear.

Travis: So it's almost respect plus awe.

Wes: Oh, that's good. I like that.

Travis: Because God is still -- he's still -- I'm never going to get over how big and how -- you know, even not seeing the face of God as, you know, is

what would cause so much fear in people as they see him. It's like even just conceptualizing it kind of fills me with awe. But I also think about the difference in that fear. Even from the beginning of that fear of judgment and disobedience, you are fearing God's justice; whereas, with people, it's fearing their injustice. It's fearing the differences that we have. It's fearing that, you know, you have a -- the "you" of all the people that we come into contact with -- I don't know -- I don't know where you're coming from. I don't know if we're talking about the same God always. I don't know -- and I think that you see that between denominations. You see that between different sects of Christianity, and you certainly see it between Christians and the world. And I think that's where -- like when we get real practical about how we think about this idea of reconciliation with God and reconciliation with man, I think that's where I get tripped up, is my instinct is to put God first because, like -- I mean, like we've already talked about, it's not always going to be possible to reconcile with others even if I am doing everything I need to do in order to bring that about, and I'm not saying I always do, but --

Wes: And I would say -- let me just interrupt you for a second.

Travis: Please.

Wes: I would say it's never going to be possible to reconcile with all others.

Travis: Right.

Wes: It is going to be possible to reconcile with some others.

Travis: Yes.

Wes: And I think that's where -- if we're to the point where I can't be reconciled with anybody because nobody -- and obviously that's not what

you're saying -- then, obviously, that's on me. Like if I can't be reconciled with anybody -- and I know people that are in that category, and it's sad.

Travis: Not a spiritual phrase at all, but if the common denominator in all your dysfunctional relationships is you, like --

Wes: That's exactly right. And, you know, I think one of the things -- not to interrupt you too much. I hope you can go back to that thought. But one of the things that I think is important in this discussion, when you were talking it reminded me of I Timothy 3, and Paul is talking about how we behave in the church. He calls the church the "household of God," and he says, "...if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God," so there are household rules. Like this is how you're supposed to behave in the family of God, and he says this is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

I think that's an important concept that we -- we tend to think about -- we tend to, like, have this hypothetical idea in our head, like of somebody being stuck on a desert island and they have the Bible, and they can be right with God because they have the Bible, and obviously they have water there, and so they can get baptized and they can have the Bible, so they can have a right relationship with God, but that's not how Christianity has ever worked. The way of Jesus has always been passed down from person to person, so the only way that we've ever come to know God through Jesus is through the church, which is the pillar and the buttress of truth. I mean, even baptism itself has to be administered. And I know some people might argue with this, but I would -- this is a hill I would die on. It has to be administered by someone else. The whole idea is that the church passes on the truth. And so

that -- again, even in that, there is a horizontal and a vertical. It's incarnated. The truth of Jesus is incarnated, not just in his body, but in the body of Christ.

Travis: I think about -- specifically about baptism, but then I think you can expand this out to all of the Christian life and walk, the idea of how important it was when Jesus raises from the dead, and that when we raise up out of the waters of baptism, that we have a witness, that we have fellow people that know who we are now and that they know the truth that we've been raised into.

Wes: Yes.

Travis: But then you expand that out into the Christian life. It's like, no, you need witnesses to your Christian life.

Wes: Yeah. It's into a community, and that's the thing. And I think that, on the one hand -- like the Catholic church tends to take that idea that the sacraments are given by the church and that only church leaders are endowed or appointed to be able to distribute the sacraments. And then, on the other hand, the evangelical world tends to take it to another extreme that says we don't actually need the church. All we need is a personal faith, a personal relationship with Jesus. And then they try to also say, yeah, but you really should come to church, too. That's also really important. And, yeah, you probably should get baptized and you should do all of this stuff. And I think where we try to be is this biblical -- I don't want to think of it necessarily as in the middle of those two views, but in some ways I think it is, in that we do believe in a priesthood of all believers, that any Christian can baptize another Christian, but that you only come to Jesus through

people. You only come to Jesus through the sharing of the gospel with you by someone else and someone else baptizing you, and when you're baptized into Jesus, you're baptized into the community of Jesus.

And so all of this -- it incorporates both the divine and human beings, and that is the gospel. It is this partnership between humans and the divine. Even in Jesus himself, singular, it is the divine and the human; and then the church becomes the body of Christ, and so in us is both the divine, the vertical, and the human, the horizontal. And so to take one of those and say, well, all I really need is this vertical relationship. I'll live on a desert island and I'll have my Bible. Even the idea of the Bible, that has been taken -- we've taken it for granted. We're very privileged in that we all have a copy of the Bible and a lot of people are literate in today's world. That hasn't always been true. For the vast majority of human history, people -- God's people haven't had their own personal copy of the scriptures nor been able to read it, and so it's always been a joint effort between the divine and the human. It's always been a joint effort between God and humans. Jesus himself is singularly that reality, but then the church is also that reality.

Thank you so much for being part of the Radically Christian Bible Study podcast today. We hope that you've enjoyed this episode. I want to give a special thanks to Travis Pauley and to our McDermott Road church family for making this podcast possible. As always, we love you, God loves you, and we hope that you have a wonderful day.