

Speak Where The Bible Speaks

TRAVIS: All right, everybody. Welcome back to the Bible Study podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. Hope you enjoy this conversation.

All right. And we're back. Hi, Wes.

WES: Hi, Travis. How are you?

TRAVIS: I'm doing great. How are you?

WES: I'm doing great.

TRAVIS: We are back with another episode today. We have a question, right?

WES: Yeah, we do. Somebody e-mailed in, Justin, and wanted to ask us a question. Did you want to read it or you want me to read it?

TRAVIS: I can read it. From Justin: "Would you be willing to give an honest assessment or opinion of the traditionally held mantra of 'Speak where the Bible speaks and stay silent where it is silent'? I've often heard this throughout my life, but I can honestly say that it seems to me we sometimes tend to say a lot where the Bible says nothing, which tends to cause fracturing among believers. I won't state the specifics here because I would love to see how you explore and navigate the topic without me influencing your direction. I greatly appreciate your work for the kingdom and look forward to your insight."

WES: I love this question, and I love Justin, by the way. I won't say his last name, or his family's name, but I recently got to meet Justin, so shout out to Justin and to his family. They are fantastic people, and I love them and appreciate them, and so I'm excited to -- I'm surprised we haven't talked

about this question. I even asked you ahead of time, I was like, "Are you sure we haven't covered this?" Because it's a phrase, obviously, that in churches of Christ we use a lot. And so if listeners are from -- grew up in churches of Christ, they're probably familiar with this phrase, and if not -- I don't know. I don't know if, outside the restoration movement, it gets used a lot because it is a very restoration-movement-specific phrase. What is your experience with that phrase, I guess?

TRAVIS: Well, yeah, growing up in churches of Christ, I heard it a lot. And I think, you know, as we were just -- as I was reading through the question, I thought to myself, like, the implication behind the phrase, and maybe the reason it's associated with the restoration movement, is to not -- it's not just don't speak where the Bible is silent; it's don't speak with biblical authority where the Bible is silent, right?

WES: That's a good way to put it.

TRAVIS: And I think sometimes the simplicity of the phrase implies, like, well, if the Bible doesn't mention it, then we don't talk about it. It's like, well, a lot has changed in 2,000 years since the book was finalized. We have a lot of different variables in daily life, so if we didn't ever speak on anything that the Bible doesn't directly speak about, that wouldn't necessarily work, but the idea being, if there's not a -- if there's not something specific, don't speak with the authority of the Bible, so -- but, yeah, I've heard that phrase constantly.

WES: I really like that, "biblical authority." So the phrase -- it was first stated as "Where the scriptures speak, we speak, and where the scriptures are silent, we are silent," and that phrase was coined by Thomas Campbell,

who's the father of Alexander Campbell, and that was in 1809, and he was talking about the animosities and controversies between rival sects, and he was disgusted with the petty differences which occasioned alienation and strife. So the restoration movement was really borne out of this disgust with division, this disgust with denominationalism, this disgust with people saying, "I'm a Baptist," or, "I'm a Presbyterian," or, "I am a" whatever it may be, and so they were tired of all of the division. They were tired, even, of not being able to preach what they found in scripture because their denominational leaders wouldn't allow them to preach those things, and so they broke away from their denominational groups, and they were really starting a unity movement. It wasn't an ecumenical movement. It wasn't a movement that said we're just going to disregard any -- any disagreements. It wasn't one that said that what you believe doesn't matter. It very much was rooted in what you believe matters, but surely we can find a way to have unity, and one of the things that Campbell proposed was this idea of speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where the Bible, or scripture, is silent.

And so this is sort of a description of that speech and kind of what was going on then. Let's see. Here's one of the summaries of what Campbell said in his speech. I'll link all of this in the show notes, but it says, "God had provided, in his sacred word, an infallible standard which was all-sufficient and alone-sufficient as a basis of union and Christian cooperation. He showed" -- Campbell showed -- "however, that men had not been satisfied with scriptures' teachings, but had gone outside of the Bible to frame for themselves religious theories, opinions, and speculations

which were the real occasions of the unhappy controversies and strifes which had so long decimated the religious world." So what Campbell was saying was that the reason we have the religious divisions that we have is because either people have disregarded what scripture plainly teaches or they've added their own opinions to what scripture teaches, and so those two things are the root cause of all of the divisions that we have. Either we're not doing what scripture says or we're doing what scripture doesn't talk about at all, and because of that, because we've added to or taken away from scripture, we have all of these divisions. And so he proposed that if scripture says it, let's speak where scripture speaks, and if scripture doesn't say it, let's not bind anything on anyone else that scripture doesn't say.

Here's how his statement was summed up. So this is kind of a -- what one person said who was listening to it, was aware of the whole situation, and here's how he summarized that statement of "Speak where scripture speaks." He said, "There should be no contention henceforth in regard to the opinions of men, however wise or learned. Whatever private opinions might be entertained upon matters not clearly revealed must be retained in silence and no effort must be made to impose them upon others." So in other words, the silent aspect -- and that's what Justin is really asking about, where scripture is silent, we are silent. Campbell wasn't suggesting that we don't talk about things that scripture doesn't talk about, like you have to be quiet about those things; we're not going to discuss those things. He wasn't talking about not discussing them. He was talking about not binding them on other people. So he was saying you're going to have your opinions about things scripture doesn't speak about. I'm going to have my opinions about

things scripture doesn't clearly speak about, and where we have those differences of opinion, we're not going to try to enforce those upon other people or bind those upon other people. We're not going to say, "No, you have to see this the same way I do. If scripture isn't clear about X, Y, and Z, then I'm not going to force you to hold my opinion." So that's the silent aspect of it. It's not to say that we can't discuss it. It's not to say that we can't form opinions about it, but that we have to practice Romans 14.

This comes right from Romans 14, the idea that we're going to come to certain conclusions. And the word that we translate "opinions" in Romans 14 is "dialogismos" in the Greek, and it really means a conclusion that we've drawn, and Paul says we have to not judge one another based on our conclusions, our dialogismos, and so we have to tolerate each other's opinions. So if scripture is clear and explicit on something, then we need to hold to that. We need to teach that. We need to practice that. And if scripture is not clear on something, if it's ambiguous or it just doesn't address something, then we need to allow one another to have a freedom of opinion and to have differing opinions and still be united in our common faith.

TRAVIS: Yeah. So as we're talking about this and kind of zooming out on this idea of speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible's silent, what comes to mind for me is, so when does that pop up? Because usually when we say that, it's broadly speaking. You don't usually say that when you're dealing with an issue where, well, are we speaking where the Bible speaks, or are we speaking where it's silent? You know what I mean?

WES: Yeah.

TRAVIS: So I'm trying to think of like where have I seen this actually

happen.

WES: Sure.

TRAVIS: Whether it's in the churches of Christ or Christendom at large, where something has happened. Do you have any, like, examples?

WES: The first thing that happened on the night where Campbell first said this -- he was in a group of people from all different religious backgrounds, most of whom -- or a lot of whom were baptized as infants, were sprinkled as infants, and someone asked that question. That was the first question, I think, that was asked based on this statement: Well, what about infant baptism? And Campbell just kind of said, maybe without even really thinking about it, that if scripture doesn't condone or doesn't authorize infant baptism, then we're not going to practice it. And then it was like, oh, okay, what does that mean? Does that mean everybody that was sprinkled needs to be baptized as adults? And so they had to kind of work through that. Most of the application of this idea, this principle, gets applied to religious practice because that's what they were concerned about.

TRAVIS: Worship. I've definitely heard it referenced in that.

WES: Yeah, what we do in worship, so our ecclesiology, our church stuff, how we organize the church. So our ecclesiology, our -- sometimes on theology, what we believe about God, but, typically, not even that broadly, and we're certainly not talking about how we live our lives. And so this has some application, but it cannot be our primary hermeneutic. Like it can't be -- we've got to be very careful with how we practice this idea, but, again, primarily, their question was around how do we have Christian unity? And how we have Christian unity is that we're very explicit on the things that

scripture is explicit about, but whatever it doesn't address, you know, we give each other the freedom to have differing opinions. And, yeah, I think there's a lot of wisdom in that, especially when it comes to how can we be unified together with brothers and sisters.

But it doesn't mean -- again, it doesn't mean that whatever scripture does not explicitly address, that we can't sort of form very important conclusions. And Campbell -- both Thomas Campbell and Alexander Campbell realized that, that there is a certain maturing of Christians, that we're going to start to come up with conclusions that are really important. As you said, time has changed. And so for thinking through, like, what does discipleship look like in the 21st century versus what did it look like in the 1800s or what did it look like in the first century -- we're dealing with very different things. Pornography wasn't a thing in the first century. It wasn't really a thing the way that it is now before photographs and video, and so what is -- well, there are certain principles that are explicit in scripture about lust and about your heart and your mind, and then we apply those things to these modern things like pornography. Well, pornography isn't explicitly addressed in scripture, but lust is, and so we apply that. What about things like gambling? We have gambling that is widespread and is different than it was in the first century or in the ancient world. I'm sure they had some sort of gambling then, but our modern casinos and things like that, well, scripture doesn't really explicitly talk about that, but it does talk about greed and covetousness and how we use money and how we think about money.

And so does that mean we should never talk about these issues like pornography and gambling and these things that scripture doesn't explicitly

address? No, of course not. There are these broad principles that scripture lays out, and then we have to admonish each other and encourage each other and teach each other as we practice these things. But again -- so we have to sort of remember what they were dealing with. They were talking about how do we have unity amongst believers from different religious backgrounds? Well, the way we do that is we leave a lot of our religious baggage behind and we just stick to what scripture teaches and we leave those other things sort of to private opinion.

Now, there are some things that I think we have to address that this doesn't mean. One, it doesn't mean that what scripture hasn't, quote-unquote, "authorized" is necessarily sinful. We get into this issue when it comes to things like instrumental music. Like I've said before, I'll continue to say, I am a firm believer in acappella singing, and this is one of the reasons I'm a firm believer in it, is for the sake of unity. Because if we focus on singing, we can all agree. Everybody can agree. People from all kinds of religious backgrounds can agree that there's nothing wrong, and there's all kinds of good, with Christians singing together. This is a biblical thing. We see it explicitly taught in scripture. Explicitly taught in scripture is singing. We don't see the early church using instruments in scripture. Like we just don't see that. Now, can we take the next step and say, well, since scripture doesn't authorize it, it must be a sin? Okay, wow. Now we're going too far, I think. That's not what Campbell was saying. He wasn't saying that if scripture is silent on something, then it's a sin. He's saying for the sake of unity, let's speak where scripture speaks and be silent where scripture is silent.

So we have to be very careful that -- and this is why. Even within the restoration movement, we've drawn all of these lines: Bible classes, fellowship halls, kitchens, supporting colleges out of the church funds, again, instrumental music, all kinds of different things where, on the one hand, I could for sure agree, hey, for the sake of unity, let's do things this way. And I could agree with maybe even some of the most conservative voices within the restoration movement and say, "I agree with that. For the sake of unity, let's leave all the baggage aside." But if we're going to take the extra step and say anyone who does X, Y, and Z is no longer my brother or sister in Christ, that they are outside of Christ, they're outside of the grace of God and they're sinning, now we've gone beyond what this idea was in the beginning.

And not only that, that idea of condemning each other over our dialogismos, our opinions, the conclusions that we've drawn -- the idea of condemning each other over those opinions, that idea is explicitly condemned in scripture. And so we have to be so careful that we're not judging and condemning one another for violating this principle, in our mind, because, again, this principle comes from Thomas Campbell; it doesn't come from the apostle Paul or from Jesus. It's a good principle and I agree with it in principle, but, again, he didn't mean that anything on which scripture is silent is sinful.

TRAVIS: Yeah. And to go back to the acappella versus instrumental, like I personally have had kind of a relationship with that, where I grew up in an acappella church, and over the years -- whether visiting family or friends over the years, I've worshipped at places that use instruments, and, again, my

opinions on it evolved over time, where it was like I don't think there's anything wrong with it. But then a wisdom sort of developed where I said what I like about acappella is that it encourages -- in fact, it sort of demands my participation. Whereas I always felt any time I was at a place with instruments, there was just less of a need -- especially if it's a big -- like they have a full band. It's not like a piano or -- but if it's like a full band, it's like, well, they don't need me. They don't need me singing. They've got that covered. And so I like acappella. I find that it's encouraging for me to worship that way. I find then I get the opportunity to be an encouragement to others that I'm worshipping with that way. So, again, I still don't think it's wrong, like you said, to -- it's necessarily a sin to be worshipping with instruments, but I found that there's a wisdom behind doing it this way.

And I think -- so to speak to that idea of being silent where the Bible is silent not necessarily meaning we don't talk about it, we don't talk about anything the Bible doesn't specifically condemn or address, I think -- that's where I think I've seen people in the church go wrong a lot, is that there actually is some wisdom behind some of the things that we do and encourage others to do. But when we start demanding it like it's scriptural, then we sort of invalidate the actual wisdom that we've discovered behind why we do what we do. You sort of forget -- I think it's a classic case with tradition, where, at one point, there was a reason behind it, but then you stopped worrying about the reason and you just worried about enforcing it, you know?

WES: Yeah, that's exactly right. We have stopped -- there's a ton of wisdom behind acappella singing, or a lot of different practices, and we have stopped

trying to winsomely win people over to this idea through teaching it. We've just acted like anybody who doesn't see things our way or do things our way is a sinner or is wrong or is whatever, and that, in and of itself -- that attitude is a problem.

Now, I want to take one step further, and this applies also to singing and instrumental music. I think the other thing to apply here is that it doesn't mean that we can automatically assume that everything scripture doesn't condemn or authorize is okay, that we should just do it, you know, whatever. So while I'm -- here's where I am. It's like I have a lot of reasons why I believe acappella singing is good and right, and I'm not willing to go so far as to say someone is sinning for using instrumental music. I also want to be very careful in not endorsing it, either, because I can't find anything in scripture to endorse it, and so I'm not going to say, "Hey, that's fine; it's just not my thing," because I can't say that because scripture doesn't say that. So I have to be very careful -- or I want to be careful because I love Campbell's statement here. I love this principle. I want to be careful in both my condemnation and not condemn where scripture doesn't condemn, but I also want to be careful in my endorsement and not endorse where scripture doesn't endorse, and that's a very challenging place to be.

And it's even more challenging as we add this third element, which is the expediency. So in restoration-movement churches, we often hold this principle and say "Only what's authorized. We're going to speak where scripture speaks. We're going to be silent where scripture is silent," but what about things like church buildings? What about things like -- and so we've filled in the blank and said, well, we kind of have to have something because

we don't have the means by which to accomplish what scripture tells us to accomplish unless we do something. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel." Well, how do you get there? Okay. Planes and cars and boats and whatever. Are all of those things, quote-unquote, "authorized" even though scripture doesn't speak to those things? Well, then we've kind of created a loophole for ourselves to kind of do what we wanted to do. We'll just call that an expedient. We'll just call that the means by which we're accomplishing what scripture tells us to do.

So, again, it becomes very complicated, but I think the overall point of this statement, and the overall heart of Jesus in the New Testament, is to be wise, be circumspect, and to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. And I think this is one of those principles that helps us to do that, to be very careful what we practice, be careful what we condemn, be careful what we endorse, and just try to maintain this submission to scripture and to apostolic authority.

TRAVIS: I keep thinking about this passage now in Acts 15, the council of Jerusalem. They're discussing Gentile conversion to Christianity. How are we going to go forward from here? And they're arguing about what they should demand of the Gentiles becoming Christians. And in Acts 15:13, James, I believe the brother of Jesus, steps up and says, "Brothers, listen to me. Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written: 'Afterward, I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord, including the Gentiles -- all

those I have called to be mine. The Lord has spoken -- he who made these things known so long ago.' And so my judgment is that we should not make it more difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations."

I love that idea of James stepping in and saying we shouldn't make it harder. And I think, like what we're talking about with traditions and binding them on each other, so much of that is making it exclusive, making it harder for people of different backgrounds to come to Christ, and also harder -- not only -- like in this case, I feel like when I read that, I'm thinking about, well, they've -- Gentiles have become Christians, and now there's a discussion about how do we integrate them into the body as a whole? But then I also think about, what about the Gentiles who aren't Christians yet? How are you going to make the faith attractive? Not falsely so, but how are you going to -- are you going to be welcoming, or are you immediately going to hand them a rulebook, which so much of the New Testament, in Jesus' fulfillment of the law, is that's not how we're going to do things anymore. There are things that are required of you, and there are things that you're required not to do and participate in, but James, the brother -- the physical brother of Jesus comes in and says we really -- I mean, he lists four things, and three of them are dietary customs that the Jews had.

WES: Yeah. And you're exactly right, and that's exactly the point of the restoration movement. That's what Campbell was trying to accomplish, was

that we have this beautiful gospel, and the testimony to the beauty of the gospel is the unity of the believers, and that unity has been fractured because of the traditions that we have tried to bind on each other. And so if we could, for the sake of unity, lay down our traditions so that we could be one with each other, then we would be accomplishing what the gospel is calling us -- we recorded a podcast a few weeks ago on the reconciliation with God and also the reconciliation with people, and that eagerness to maintain the unity and the bond of peace is right at the heart of the gospel.

But unfortunately, when we take even this principle right here, we can use this principle to create even further division. And when we take a principle that was created to bring unity and we use it to create division, now we've totally missed the point. And so things like acappella singing could be an incredibly unifying thing, to say, listen, I know you're used to a rock band and you're kind of used to a -- what do you call it, classical music, and you're kind of used to just a piano, and you're kind of used to this, and you're kind of used to country music. Well, listen, what if we just came together and we just sang pure, simple, participatory hymns and we're all the choir, all of us are the choir, all of us are the band, and we use our hearts and our voices to praise and glorify God and we're together in this? Like then we take something that, instead of using it to beat somebody over the head and say we're right and you're wrong, then it becomes an effort to be unified. That's what the restoration movement was about in the beginning. And I keep saying "restoration movement," but really that's what the gospel is calling us to be.

Now, I want to -- we'll get into this, I think, after the break, but I want

to get to I Corinthians 4:6, which says that we should not go beyond what is written, and I want to talk about what does that mean and how does that apply to our discussion right now.

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: Okay. Well, I wanted to get into an actual Bible study because so far, we've talked about studying the Bible or we've talked about, specifically, Thomas Campbell's idea of speaking where scripture speaks and being silent where scripture is silent, and one of the sort of proof texts that we use for that idea is Paul saying, in I Corinthians 4:6, not to go beyond what is written. Now, just in quoting that, it's difficult to quote it because it's part of a larger sentence, of course, and that sentence is part of a larger idea. And I think that we -- number one, we are using it just horribly out of context when we use it to say anything that you do that scripture doesn't say you can do is a sin. When we use it that way, we're using it very differently than what Paul meant. But I think there is definitely application of what Paul is saying here to what we're talking about.

Let's look specifically -- I know we don't have a lot of time, but, specifically, I'm going to read I Corinthians 4:6, and I'm going to read it in

the English Standard. I'm going to let you read some from earlier in I Corinthians, and then we'll let you from read from your translation I Corinthians 4 in a second, because you're reading from the New Living, and the way that it translates this is very different, and I want to wait until the end to have you read it.

Here's the whole -- the totality of I Corinthians 4:6. Paul says, "I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another." Now, there's all kinds of challenges to how this passage is translated, and that is borne out in the fact that our two translations render it very differently. There's all kinds of different translation challenges in this passage, and so we need to be very careful, when passages are translated differently, that we don't just accept the one that we like. We have to look at all of them and recognize, oh, there's a very different way of translating this, and that will help us to understand what's the idea here when we see sort of the overlap between all of the different translations. We can sort of pick up on the nuance when we look at the overlap. It's very difficult when we just assume that one English translation captures the totality of the idea.

Now, a lot of commentators think that when Paul says not to go beyond what is written, he's specifically talking about, in context, the things he's quoted from scripture. So from the beginning of this letter, he's been quoting from scriptures, saying "It is written, it is written, it is written, it is written, it is written," and then saying, "Don't go beyond that. Don't exceed that." What Paul cannot mean here is don't add to scripture, because we

believe Paul is adding to scripture right now. As he's writing this letter, he's adding to what has been written. He's adding a new letter to the canon of scripture, and many more letters would be written after this. So he's not saying don't add to the canon of scripture. He's not even saying don't -- you know, again, that's not the idea that he's saying. Of course we shouldn't add to the canon of scripture, but Paul is doing that as he's writing.

It's probably a better way to understand it, that he's saying all these things that I've told you that scripture says, don't exceed those. Don't go beyond what scripture is telling you in these passages and, of course, in the totality of scripture. But when he says "scripture," he specifically means the Old Testament scripture. He means the Hebrew scriptures. And here are some of the things that he was saying when he was -- what he was referring to in saying don't go beyond this.

You want to read for us I Corinthians 1:17-19?

TRAVIS: "For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News -- and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power. The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the scriptures say, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.'"

WES: Okay. And there he's quoting from Isaiah 29:14. So he quotes from Isaiah, he quotes from Jeremiah, he quotes again from Isaiah, he quotes from Job, and he quotes from Psalms, all leading up to what he says in Chapter 4, and I'm just going to go through and read the quotations that he makes in all of these passages, and I just kind of want us to think about, is there an

overarching theme to all of these quotations, so that when he says, in Chapter 4, "Don't go beyond this stuff. Don't go beyond these writings," is he talking about just in general, or is he talking about something specific? And if they all have one idea, one overarching idea, then, again, that might help us to discern what he means by that.

So he says in I Corinthians 1:31, quoting from Jeremiah, he says, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." And then in Chapter 2, he says, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." And then he says in Chapter 2, "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" He says in Chapter 3, "God catches the wise in their craftiness," and then right after that he quotes, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." So, again, I'm going to read all of those back to back again. "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him. For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? He catches the wise in their craftiness. The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

So if we go back and we read all the things that Paul has quoted up to this point -- what scripture says, what has been written, and what has been written is God is wiser than the wisest. All of the wise people in the world know nothing. The wisdom of God is so much greater, so much broader, so much deeper than the wisdom of man. And so all of these wise people that think they've got it all understood and think they've got it all figured out,

they know nothing, and so all of these passages are telling people, "Be humble. Be humble. Stop thinking that you're so wise, or God will humble you."

TRAVIS: Well, one of the ways that that's illustrated in scripture where we've -- I mean, we get in the gospels, and who is Jesus up against? He's up against the Pharisees.

WES: Absolutely.

TRAVIS: And I once heard an analogy a preacher gave that where the Pharisees had gone wrong over the years dealing with the law was they had taken God's law, and out of perhaps a very sincere devotion to God, not wanting to break the law, they built a fence around the law and said, "Okay. We're not just going to not break the law that God's given us; we're not going to step over this fence around the law." And then the next generation came along and they built another fence around the fence, to the point where they -- kind of like what we've been talking about, they had these traditions that were not in the law, but they treated it like it was because of generations of -- again, perhaps borne out of sincerity, perhaps borne out of devotion to God, but they're relying on the wisdom of man as opposed to the wisdom that God gave them in scripture. And that also gets back to this idea I keep thinking about, that what are we reading scripture for in the first place? Is it, like you mentioned the phrase, to beat people over the head with it, to beat ourselves over the head with it? Or is it to learn God's wisdom and to hopefully gain some --

WES: To learn to love like Jesus. That's our goal.

TRAVIS: Yeah, back to the tag line. But that's something, as I've matured

more in Christ and more from the faith that I had growing up -- because, as a kid, it's -- you know, it's -- you may not think about it this way as a kid, but it's nice to just have the rules handed to you in some sense, but as you mature in your faith, one of the things I've come to appreciate is what is God trying to impart to me to not just help on this thing that -- this story that I'm reading and this situation that it's referencing, or this sin that it's guarding me against, but what are the implications for me and how to live my life in all these other areas where maybe the Bible is silent? I feel like that's a very different way of reading scripture than just trying to get this fill-in-the-blank, what do I do, what do I not do, and what do I make sure other people do and don't do?

WES: Yeah. And that really is the key, is that humility, that we know we're on the right track to understanding scripture when we are humble. James calls it the meekness of wisdom. When it is developing in us this profound sense of humility before God where we prefer other people -- Paul calls it, in Philippians 2, "having the mind of Christ, where we consider others to be more significant than ourselves." Jesus talks about taking the log out of our eye before we take the speck out of another. James says, in Chapter 3:1 of his letter, he says don't try to become teachers. Don't presume to be teachers. "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers." This is exactly what Paul is talking about. He's talking about, in Corinth, they had these teachers who thought they were something else. They thought that they had figured it all out and they had all of this wisdom and they were very profound, they were great speakers, and they were articulate, they were able to express things, and people really just fell over backwards about them.

Now, I think what Paul is saying in I Corinthians 4 is he said I've applied this to myself and to Apollos so that you learn not to exceed what scripture says for you to be and to do, which is to be humble, to humble yourself before the Lord. I don't even think that the problem was -- there's a lot of disagreement around this, but I don't think the problem was that the people in Corinth were going gaga over Paul and Peter and Apollos. I think they were going gaga over other teachers that Paul doesn't even mention. I think he's saying, "I'm applying this to myself and to Apollos, but it's really about these other unnamed teachers that think that they are something else. They think that they are big, bad, so wise, so articulate, that they are quite the philosophers, and you guys are all just going gaga over them." And so Paul is saying, I've laid all of this out and I've told you what scripture says, and this is what scripture says: Scripture says that it's the wisdom of God. It's not the wisdom of man. It's not the wisdom of the world, and so stop exceeding scripture. Stop thinking you know better than scripture by putting yourself on a pedestal, by putting other people on a pedestal. When you do that, when you put yourself and human teachers on a pedestal, you are exceeding what scripture says because you are not listening to and submitting to scripture when it says that God is wise and we are all a bunch of fools, and so you are not listening to God when you put yourself and other people on a pedestal.

Now, sort of with that in mind, if you want to read I Corinthians 4 -- read 1 through 7, if you don't mind, from the New Living Translation because I think it captures this idea pretty well.

TRAVIS: Sure. I Corinthians 4:1: "So look at Apollos and me as mere

servants of Christ who have been put in charge of explaining God's mysteries. Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful. As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority. I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide. So don't make judgments about anyone ahead of time -- before the Lord returns. For he will bring our darkest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. Then God will give to each one whatever praise is due. Dear brothers and sisters, I have used Apollos and myself to illustrate what I've been saying. If you pay attention to what I have quoted from the scriptures, you won't be proud of one of your leaders at the expense of another. For what gives you the right to make such a judgment? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if everything you have is from God, why boast as though it were not a gift?"

WES: So the context of this phrase, "Don't go beyond what is written" is humility. Now, whatever Paul means by that, whether he means specifically the scriptures that he's quoted, like the New Living Translation translates it, interprets it, or whether he means the totality of scripture, I'm okay either way, because scripture, in totality, teaches humility, that God is so much wiser than we are. And when we put ourselves on a pedestal and think that we've figured it out and that this wisdom comes from us, we have exceeded scripture. When we condemn, when we judge, when we approve, when we endorse where scripture doesn't, then I think this does apply to that, even though that's not specifically what Paul is saying about doing things

scripture doesn't endorse or doing things scripture is silent on. That's not what he's saying. He's saying you are exceeding scripture when you put yourself or others on a pedestal.

But, again, everything we've talked about today is about -- I like the phrase "walking circumspectly," being very careful where we put our foot, what we decide to do. And that applies to, again, what we practice, but also what we endorse and what we condemn, and so just being very careful and saying, "Is this in keeping with the spirit of scripture? Is this in keeping with what scripture has revealed and taught us? Am I being eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace by practicing this, or am I putting myself on a pedestal?" And when we condemn, when we judge, when we're harsh, when we're just living without rules and boundaries and doing whatever we want to do and say, "Well, I like it, so we might as well do it," whatever it is, we are elevating ourself and our own wisdom, and I think I Corinthians 4 has a lot to say about that.

And that's what was going on in Corinth. Divisions were created because they were elevating their own wisdom, and that speaks to religious problems from the first century to today. Divisions are created when we elevate our own wisdom above the wisdom of scripture, above the wisdom of God, and so we have to put Jesus on the pedestal and take ourselves off. **TRAVIS:** This all reminds me, kind of weirdly -- it's not directly related to what we're talking about, but it reminds me of later in the New Testament when we read, "Don't say to yourselves, well, I have made this plan and we're going to go do these things; we're going to go to this city. Say instead, if the Lord wills, we'll do this or that." Like that's one of the

encouragements of scripture, is don't even presume to make plans without taking into account that God is in control. God is in control of the future. He's certainly in control of the wisdom that he's imparted to us.

WES: That was James who said that, and I think you're exactly right. What Paul says in I Corinthians 1-4 runs exactly parallel to what James lays out in his book about wisdom, that wisdom is humble. The wisdom from above is meek. The wisdom from above is pure, it's gentle, it's open to reason. But again, both in those that are taking their religious traditions and practices that aren't found in scripture and saying, "This is the way we're going to do things even if it causes division," and the people that are saying, "Scripture doesn't say that so you're going to hell because you practice that" -- when we beat each other over the head, when we make judgments before time, when we presume -- that's the problem here, is being presumptuous. There are people that are presumptuous in their practices, and there are people that are presumptuous in their condemnations, and both people need to tremble before the Lord. That if we are causing division because we are being presumptuous in our judgments, or we're causing division because we're being presumptuous in our practices, we are causing division. We are causing division because we have elevated our own wisdom and haven't submitted to the wisdom of God.

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.