

Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast

Asking Better Questions of the Bible

TRAVIS: Hello, everybody, and welcome back to the Bible study podcast. My name is Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. I hope you enjoy this episode.

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

WES: Hey, Travis. How are you?

TRAVIS: I'm doing well. How about you?

WES: I'm doing great.

TRAVIS: We're back at the podcast, and I feel like we haven't done this in a while, where you know the topic and I'm pretty blind to it at the moment.

WES: Well, actually, I think both of us are fairly blind to this one.

TRAVIS: Oh, good. I don't know that we've ever done that.

WES: Right. Well, I thought I knew where we were going, and then I went back in the archives and realized, oh, we've actually already talked about this, but I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. So back in 2020, we did -- so much has changed in the world since 2020.

TRAVIS: That feels like ten years ago.

WES: So I don't know that anything we did prior to 2020 should even count. So anyway, we did a two-part series on asking better Bible questions. As I was preparing this, I was kind of thinking this seems familiar. I did a series in a Bible class one time where I did -- basically, I called it, like, Bible Q&A, and I think everyone who attended the class -- it was kind of a bait and switch. I didn't necessarily intend for it to be, but they kind of thought that it was going to be me answering their Bible questions, but it was

actually me encouraging them to ask better questions of the Bible, to figure out how do we go to scripture to answer our questions.

So if you remember this episode or this discussion from three years ago, great. I don't think it will hurt for us to have this conversation again, because I think most Christians today tend to approach scripture as if it is this reference book that we should just be able to go to and it will answer all of our questions about God and life and morality, and heaven and hell, and the future and the past and the present, and all of these things, and we should just be able to go and, if we have a question, we can find an answer in the Bible. And so I kind of want to tackle that, just that presupposition in and of itself. And one of the things that I said over and over again -- I may have said this in the previous episodes; I don't remember -- but I know I said it in the class that I did, that that's one of the first myths that we need to dispel, that the Bible answers every question you could possibly think of.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: That's just not true. There are all kinds of questions that the Bible simply doesn't address, and I think we have to be able to say that. The Bible tells us -- scripture tells us everything that we need to know about God and about living as God's people, but beyond that, it may or may not answer some of our questions. We may be curious about all kinds of things, and we're just going to have to wait for the resurrection for Jesus to tell us what's what on all the questions that we have. So sometimes the best answer to our Bible question is "the Bible doesn't say," and we need to be really comfortable saying that, to say the Bible doesn't address that. Now, we'll come back to this idea in a second, that just because the Bible doesn't

address something explicitly doesn't mean that there's not a principle or some sort of implicit teaching, something that the Bible implies that we can sort of infer from scripture and apply to the question that we're asking. So we can come back to that, but we just have to get really comfortable with that idea that the Bible doesn't answer every question that we could possibly think up.

TRAVIS: You know, I just started recently -- something I've not been very good at for a long time is just daily reading my Bible and reading through portions of scripture that are tough. So lately, I've been going through Isaiah. Every night I read a couple chapters, and there's parts of Isaiah that are, like, just so uplifting and it points to Jesus and it points to the kingdom that's coming, and then there's parts like about Damascus and Assyria, and there's just these long prophecies about what's coming in the short-term, in the medium-term, and in the long-term that are tough. They're tough to read. And I think the thing that's been tough about that for me -- and I think for a lot of people -- is, like, how does this apply to me? What do I do with this? That's actually a question I've heard people ask about a lot of scripture.

WES: Yep.

TRAVIS: And one thing that I've started to realize as I read it is, like, well, I'm not going to the Bible for a fish. I'm reading it to craft a fishing pole for myself. You know, I want the Bible to make me wise. And we've talked before about how a lot of the stories, especially in the Old Testament, how they would have been read by, particularly, the Jews that were telling them orally and writing them down, you know, the scribes and reading them in the synagogues, that their mindset, as I understand it, was "We want this to

make us wise."

WES: Right. Shape us, yeah.

TRAVIS: Because like you said, the Bible isn't going to answer every single question that we have, but with the idea of walking with God, hopefully we walk a little bit closer and a little bit closer with him the more we gain from the wisdom that he's left us with the Spirit. So that's really helped me kind of even in some of those tough areas of the Bible, Leviticus and some of the prophecies, where, you know, I don't always understand what's going on. I don't always understand what I'm reading. I'm trying to meditate on it with that idea of I'm not just looking for a fish. I'm not just looking for a basketful of fish; I'm actually looking for a fishing rod.

WES: Yeah. I think that highlights the two ways that are very common of reading the Bible. One is devotionally and one is deductively. So devotional reading is -- to your point about reading Isaiah, is just reading until something makes us feel good, you know, something or --

TRAVIS: "Ooh, I could use that. "

WES: Right, exactly. Well, that's more the deductive. So like the devotional is just reading for inspiration or encouragement, something I can underline or something I can write in my journal or whatever, my life verse or whatever, and I don't mean to dismiss that because there can be a lot of value in that.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: And you read something and it, quote-unquote, speaks to you, okay, great. That shouldn't be the only way you read scripture, but that can be a way to read scripture.

Another way is deductively, in that we are going to scripture looking for clues, and we're going to scripture and we're looking specifically for the answers to the questions we already have, which is why I say that -- you know, when we say, "Ooh, I could use that," we're saying, "Ooh, that seems like, at least, that it answers a question that I have." And this is really what I want to get to. Most of our questions that we ask about the Bible -- we say, well, what does the Bible say about this? What does the Bible say about that? You can go to Google, and it will autopopulate for you what does the Bible say about -- and it'll give you 15 things that people are asking, commonly, what does the Bible say about this? What does the Bible say about tattoos? What does the Bible say about drinking? What does the Bible say about whatever? And so people go to the Bible asking their questions, and even in that, there is an assumption that the Bible says something that will answer this question. So they're going to scripture sort of like a detective and they're trying to deduce what scripture says about whatever, so that's that sort of deductive Bible study. It starts with a premise or a hypothesis.

And I really want to encourage people to watch this video that I just watched today, which is what made me think to do this episode. It's by -- it's on a website called "The Biblical Mind." I'll link to it in the show notes. And the name of the video is "How to Ask the Bible a Question." And this Bible professor walks into his office and there's this college student that's sitting in his office waiting for him to get there, and he said, "What's up?" And she says, "Well, I got into this heated debate online about environmentalism. What does the Bible say about that? Is God an

environmentalist?" And the professor goes, "Hmm..." and he kind of walks out of the office. She's like, "Where are you going?" And he says, "Are you coming?" And he keeps, like, just getting his coffee and just having this conversation with her about this question, "Is God an environmentalist?" So that's the question she starts with.

And it might seem silly to some people. You know, that might seem like a silly question, but it's actually a really good question, and I think that we can -- they end up getting to a really good point in their study, and he kind of walks her through a better way to study the Bible because, of course, she's just dumbfounded on where do I even start to answer that question, "Is God an environmentalist?" But it highlights something that we all tend to do when we ask deductive questions, when we read the Bible deductively. We're starting with a question that we have.

Now, first of all, we have to recognize I'm asking a question in English of a book -- or, actually, a set of books that were written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. They were translated into English, but I'm asking an English question of a Hebrew book or an Aramaic book or a Greek book. I'm asking an English question to a text of foreign language. That in and of itself can create some problems. Two, I'm asking a 21st century question to a 1st century, or older, set of texts. I'm asking maybe an American question to a Jewish text. So I'm asking a question that at least -- at least has the possibility of being out of step linguistically, being out of step in time, and being out of step in place, and being out of step in culture, and so I'm asking a question that may or may not have actually made sense to the Biblical authors.

So the Bible is a set of documents that were written by prophetic people, by prophetic men who were carried along by the Holy Spirit, but, really, the Bible doesn't say anything. These Biblical authors who were inspired by God, they said something. And presumably, if we could communicate with those people and bring them into our time and ask them these questions and say, "What do you say about this," we have to ask, would this question even make sense to them? Presuming we could translate it into their language, would it even make sense to them?

One of the problems that we tend to have is we make categorical mistakes, where we're categorizing things in such a way -- like this question that she was asking, "Is God an environmentalist," that -- that's an interesting category. An environmentalist -- what is an environmentalist? And compared to what? What is environmentalism? That's a modern category. I mean, there are certainly Biblical principles that can apply to modern environmentalism and whether or not you should be an environmentalist and to what with degree you should be an environmentalist. There are all kinds of Biblical principles that apply to that question, but the category itself is a modern category.

It's a silly example, but it's like if I ask, well, does the Bible teach people to use a Mac or a PC? Is the Bible in favor of Android or Apple? Is the Bible telling me to be a Democrat or a Republican? Well, hold on a second. All of these are very modern categories, and so we're going to this ancient set of documents asking questions about modern categories. We are poised to make all kinds -- come to all kinds of false conclusions. That's what happens with deductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning can be good,

but you have to begin with a premise that is not flawed. If you begin with a flawed premise, if you begin with a flawed assumption, then as you continue to reason -- I grew up with all kinds of syllogisms, where somebody would say, "If this, then that." You know, "If this is true and this is true, then this is true," and so they would make all of these sort of deductive reasonings. Well, wait a second. We have to go back and, if the premise with which we're beginning is flawed, then we may make some deductive -- we can reason through, and it may be a reasonable process by which we trek through scripture, but we very well may come to a wrong conclusion, not to mention the fact that as we engage in deductive reasoning or deductive Bible study, we're often pulling scriptures out of their context, so not only am I assuming -- okay, my question is, does God use Mac or PC? So there's my question. And obviously, it's flawed from the very beginning.

TRAVIS: Obviously, it's Mac.

WES: Right. Yeah, exactly. So we've got our -- and we probably -- I mean, that highlights another thing. Not only does the question itself make some categorical assumptions, it's beginning with a false premise, but chances are I'm already leaning in one direction. Chances are, when I say, what does the Bible say about tattoos, what does the Bible say about drinking alcohol --

TRAVIS: The fact that you're even asking the question, a lot of times it implies a certain bent.

WES: Exactly. And that's not necessarily wrong, and there's really no way to help that; we just have to acknowledge that. We have to acknowledge, okay, I'm going to scripture with my questions, and I'm going to scripture with my biases. I'm going to scripture with my assumptions. I'm going to

scripture with my preconceived ideas. All of these things make deductive Bible study very difficult because there is a very good possibility that I am going to find exactly what I'm looking for even if that's not actually what scripture teaches, even if that's not what the Biblical authors would say if they were sitting right in front of you where you could just ask one of the apostles or Jesus himself. Not that Jesus wrote a book in the Bible, but if you could just sit down and ask Jesus this question, how would he answer that, you may not get the same answer asking Jesus, if you were able to do that, than you would if you use your own reasoning and logic and preconceived ideas and preformulated categories and all of these things with which we approach scripture. When we take all of this to the text and we don't acknowledge, yeah, I'm bringing a lot of baggage with me -- when we don't acknowledge that from the beginning, there's a very good possibility that we're going to arrive at the wrong conclusion.

TRAVIS: And so much of that is, I think, demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus when he's -- how many times did someone -- either a common person, a Gentile, or a religious leader ask him a question and he didn't give them a straight answer?

WES: Right, right.

TRAVIS: And I think an inference we can make by how he answers so consistently, like with parables, is you're asking the wrong question.

WES: Yes, yes.

TRAVIS: And so that happens so much throughout the gospels that I think that's -- the point you just made is demonstrated even just reading through the life of Jesus.

WES: Yeah. And even that statement, "You're asking the wrong question" -- I always hate telling people that because we always grew up hearing there are no wrong questions or there are no stupid questions. I like to say there are no wrong questions, but there are questions that are better than others, and we have to acknowledge that. We have to say, yeah, this may not be the best question, or at the very least, this is not a question early Christians were asking. And if we could just say that, this is not a question early Christians were asking, or this is not a question that God's people asked historically, that, in and of itself, would go a long way in helping us to say, okay, then I need to be very careful about how I'm formulating my answer.

Now that's not to say you can't draw a fairly decent conclusion from scripture based on what it does say, but if you're asking a question that people in the 1st century or in, you know, the 10th century -- if you're asking questions that people weren't asking then, then there's a very good possibility that you're going to come to the wrong conclusions, because you're obviously pulling things out of their original context because this isn't what ancient people were asking or this isn't what ancient Jewish people were asking.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: And so we need to be able to say, "I have a question. I think it's a good question, but it's probably not a question that early Christian people were asking." There's so many examples of this that I hear all the time, and it's not to discount people's heart in asking these questions. For instance, the question of baptism.

TRAVIS: I was just thinking that.

WES: Somebody says, "Can I be a Christian -- can I be saved without being baptized?" From everything that I read in scripture, nobody was asking that question. Nobody was asking that question.

TRAVIS: The question I've heard in the modern discourse on baptism is, "I just don't understand why God would require something like that." And not to be too glib, but I'm thinking, I think the early Christians were probably thinking about, like, why is God allowing us to be crucified en masse, not why does he require us to be immersed in water.

WES: Right, yes. Why doesn't God rescue us from persecution and martyrdom?

TRAVIS: The disparity between those two questions is pretty massive.

WES: And, I mean, we joke a lot about first-world problems, but these are first-world or first-Christian-world questions that we're asking that we have the privilege and the comfort to be able to ask questions like this, but we have to acknowledge these are not questions that early Christians were asking.

Another question that gets asked a lot, especially in churches of Christ, is questions about how can we spend the church treasury. How can we spend church money, and can we do good works -- can these types of good works be done collectively, as a group, or can they only be done individually, as Christians? Okay. I mean, that's a practical question that, sure, you can have that question. You can even come to your own conclusions about that, but I don't see anywhere in scripture where that was even thought about. And one reason I don't think that was even thought

about was because our modern idea of an individual is, again, a very modern concept. That concept of being an autonomous individual that isn't inherently connected to family and community and nation, and all of these things where I see myself, first and foremost, as an individual and that I'm only voluntarily connected to other people as I choose to be -- that idea, that concept, has evolved over time for several hundred years. But in the 1st century, that really wasn't a category that they were even thinking in. Again, it is a category now, so we do have to think through that, and it's not wrong for us to say should individuals do this or should we do this together as the church family? But let's not pretend that those sorts of categories, those sorts of distinctions were being made in the 1st century because, again, these questions -- again, like Mac or PC, Apple or Android, individual or collective, like these categories exist, so we can't pretend like the categories don't exist; they do exist now, but we have to be very careful when we try to read those categories back into scripture.

The difference there -- what we call that is -- exegesis is getting a meaning out of scripture, like, "Teach me, Scripture, what you want me to know." Eisegesis is when we read it back into scripture, when we put our ideas and our categories and our assumptions into scripture as if those things were in the text in the first place. And so we have to be very careful not to read our assumptions and our modern categories into scripture, and we'll talk in the next part about how to do that.

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.

TRAVIS: So one thing that -- as we've been discussing Bible questions, I keep thinking of Bible questions that people ask, and one that I've thought about is -- I've noticed a lot of people, you know, atheists, agnostics, they often ask, well, did -- I don't hear them often ask, "Was Jesus the son of God?" Usually, it's more like, "Was Jesus real? Did Jesus really exist?" And I've wondered, with questions like that, when we go to scripture for apologetics, I've often been a little torn about, like, well, how much is scripture trying to answer those questions and how much is that our own -- and, again, not that they're bad things to be asking of reality, you know, when did the Israelites exit Egypt and questions like that that we have, but is that what the Bible is actually trying to answer, is something that I'm often torn about. What do you think about that?

WES: Well, it goes back to what we were just talking about about baptism. I think that there's two parts of that. On the one hand, you have the fact that this may not have been a question that people at the time were asking, and it may not even be a question that the -- and if that's true, then it's probably also true that that's not a question that the Biblical authors were trying to answer. Nobody's asking the question; why would they try to be answering it?

But then, number three -- and I think this is important -- why were

people not asking that question? Were they not asking that question because it was a silly question or because it wouldn't have entered their mind, or are they not asking that question because the answer is already presumed? And so, like, I think that's one of the important things when we read -- like, for instance, baptism, the reason nobody is asking the question, "Do I have to get baptized?" "Can I be saved without being baptized?" -- the reason nobody is asking that is because they already presumed the answer. They presumed that in order -- I think we have to assume that. I think that as we read it, at least it's a reasonable conclusion to come to, to say why is it that people weren't asking this question?

TRAVIS: That's interesting.

WES: That there has to be or there is a good reason to conclude that people just assumed or presumed that this was the answer. Like the question of apologetics -- especially as we read Genesis 1 and 2, like we tend to read -- as modern people, we tend to read the creation account as apologetics for the existence of God, that this is proof of the existence of God. But the writer of Genesis, Moses, and those that compiled -- anyway, that's a whole long story. But scripture wasn't written in order to prove God's existence. There probably were very few, if any, people in the world when Genesis was written that didn't believe in God. Like everyone presumed that there was a God. The only question is who is God, and what is God like, and how many gods are there? And so they were asking questions like that, and those are the types of questions that Genesis was written to answer.

But there's also a very good reason to come to the conclusion, well, obviously, the people of this time believed that there was a God. Why did

they believe that there was a God? Why have most people throughout all human history believed that there was a God? Now, people are going to come to different conclusions about that, so yes, I think we can use scripture apologetically, like was Jesus an actual, historical person? Well, I think there's a lot of ways that we can use the gospel writers' accounts and Paul's accounts to answer that question, but part of the answer is why did they not feel it was necessary to answer that question? Why were they not addressing that question? Why did they presume that the answer was obvious?

TRAVIS: I didn't realize -- I didn't think about this until you brought up that distinction, well, why weren't they asking the question at the time? And you look at the book of Acts and it's all about preaching Jesus and his resurrection -- his crucifixion and resurrection, and you don't see people -- you don't see Agrippa, you don't see Festus, you don't see them questioning, "This guy isn't real," and I would imagine a lot of that was because they probably heard a thing or two; they just weren't convinced of the son of God question.

WES: Right, absolutely.

TRAVIS: That seems to be more of a question that scripture is trying to answer because that's what people would have been asking at the time.

WES: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that that -- you know, if 2,000 years from now they're reading about American history -- let's say America no longer exists and so somebody's reading some of our documents from this time period 2,000 years from now, and they're reading some of our documents and they realize, you know what? They're not trying to prove the existence of Washington, D.C. Why is nobody trying to prove the existence

of Washington, D.C.? Or why is nobody trying to prove the existence of Joe Biden? Why is nobody trying to prove the existence of Donald Trump? Well, why? Because everybody believes those things exist. Everybody knows Washington, D.C. is a real place, and so we're writing about it presuming everybody already believes that that's -- that that's true, that there is a place called Washington, D.C., that it's real. Even if we've never seen it personally, we know that it's a real place.

And so that, in and of itself, that presumption that everyone already accepts this part of the premise as true, that should give us pause before we start to say, "I don't believe any of it." Well, hold on. Even at the time, even the skeptical people -- like we might not agree on who's better, Joe Biden or Donald Trump, or we may not agree that Washington, D.C. is a great place or a horrible place, but we all agree that those things all exist and those things are not up for debate. So if somebody is writing 2,000 years from now, they could write about, oh, well, people had different opinions about D.C. and people had different opinions about these different presidents, but nobody really questioned whether or not they existed. Like that wasn't -- and if someone did question those things, we question their sanity because they are on the margins of society. And so it's a really dangerous thing to read historical documents and to begin to question the things that, at least at the time, everyone accepted to be true, because even that should say, okay, well, there was probably a good reason.

This is another part of what we need to think about, and part of it is -- I even wrote in my notes, "Don't engage in chronological snobbery." C.S. Lewis talks about chronological snobbery. And as modern people, we tend

to have this elevated sense of ourself, and that even applies to the answers we get from scripture. We have to -- I want to come back -- let me put that on pause and we'll come back to that idea. Let me get to this idea of inductive Bible study because we talked about deductive Bible study. Deductive Bible study, we're going to scripture with our questions, and so there's a presumption that scripture is going to say something to answer these questions. There's a presumption that it's actually a good question and that I'm not making any presumptions that are going to skew my results.

A better way to read scripture is to begin with inductive Bible study. Inductive Bible study begins with what's there rather than beginning with my questions. Now, let's -- of course you're also reading an English translation. You're reading with some bias. It's impossible to get rid of some of those things. But with inductive Bible study, you're going to the text and you're saying, "What do you have to say for yourself? What do you have to say about Jesus? What do you have to say about God?" And so you're just letting the text explain itself to you. What happens -- and I believe that this is so important, that as you read the scripture over and over and over and over again, you're beginning to be -- back to your original point, you're beginning to be shaped and formed so that you're beginning to understand the sorts of things they were asking. That's why I can be fairly confident when I say early Christians were not asking, "Do I have to be baptized?"

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: I can say that because I've read through the entire New Testament multiple times and that just doesn't seem to be a question that's being addressed. It doesn't seem to be a question that's being asked. There's all

kinds of questions that are being asked. Can Jews and Gentiles live together in one church family? Do Gentile people have to be circumcised and keep kosher and keep the laws of Moses? Those were questions they were asking. They weren't asking, "Can I be a follower of Jesus and not get baptized?" That's just not a question. So over time, as you read inductively, as you just observe what's there and allow your mind and your heart to marinate in it, then it begins to shape the assumptions, because we're all going to make assumptions, but we start to make better assumptions. We start to form better conclusions about the sorts of categories we should have in mind when we go to scripture.

So, again, we don't go to scripture with the categories of Mac or PC, but we do go to scripture with the categories of Jew and Gentile, and we start to say, okay, they thought in these kinds of categories, better or worse. Maybe that wasn't a healthy way to think. Maybe they shouldn't have been thinking in those categories, but they did. And so if we just -- if we just put those categories aside and say, well, you shouldn't think in those categories -- okay, but they did, and so you're not going to understand scripture unless you start to put yourself in their shoes and to say, okay, they thought in categories like this. They used -- people, at the time, used words like "Lord," "*kyrios*," to speak of Caesar. Like the people in the Roman empire were talking about Caesar being Lord. They were talking about Caesar being the son of God. Okay, so that was a category that they had. You know, they thought of "*pistis*," or "faith," in terms of loyalty or allegiance to a Lord or a master or the emperor. So what does it mean that Jesus is adopting, appropriating this type of terminology like "Lord," "son of

God," "faith," "allegiance," "loyalty"?

TRAVIS: The gospel.

WES: The gospel, this *euangelion*, is applied not just to Augustus, but to Jesus, who is the Jewish Messiah. So when you begin to think in Biblical categories, then you can start to formulate better questions. And not only that, not only now are you going to scripture asking questions that would make sense to the Biblical authors, then I think you can make a more informed conclusion about your own questions. And so even if it's a question like, "Do I have to get baptized?" "Can I get a tattoo?" "What should I think about drinking alcohol?" As you begin to think about those questions -- and I use alcohol as an example because yes, they had alcohol in Biblical times, but not exactly the kind of alcohol we have today. I mean, they didn't have the hard liquors that we have.

TRAVIS: Sure.

WES: And so there's a lot of things that yes, there might have been something like that then, but it's not a one-to-one equivalent. And we're going to make a lot of categorical mistakes and assumptions and come to wrong conclusions unless we allow our heart and mind to be saturated with scripture first and then start to ask some of our more modern questions. And when we ask those questions -- again, we have to be very, very humble when we come to these conclusions, but if we're asking questions like, "Should this good work be done by individuals or by the church as a whole," let's be very careful. Let's be very humble as we begin to answer these questions, recognizing this really wasn't a discussion that the 1st century church was having, but it's one that the 21st century church is having, so how might

Jesus have addressed this question? How might the apostles have addressed this question? And in order to do that, we have to lean heavy on principles. We have to lean heavy.

That's why I always come back to the Sermon on the Mount. That's why I always come back to the fruit of the Spirit. That's why I always come back to these sorts of principles. Matt and I had a conversation the other day. We talked about these sort of summary passages that sort of sum up. Jesus says, "Here's the law and the prophets: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself." So these give us -- all of these summaries kind of give us boundaries and guardrails so that we know, okay, the apostles may not have given an explicit answer to this modern question, but I at least know when I'm bumping up against the guardrails because if it's not patient, and if it's not kind, and if it's envious and it's boastful and it's rude, if it's whatever, I know that it's outside of the boundaries of what is Christian, what is Biblical.

So, again, it's really -- I think we have to be very careful. This is why "Speak where the Bible speaks; be silent where the Bible is silent," because what we're essentially trying to do is put words in Jesus' mouth. We're trying to put words in the apostles' mouth, and we have to be very careful doing that. We can say, I think, "I think, if Jesus were here, he would say something like this," but I have to recognize those are my words. Those are not Jesus' words. Even though I can imagine Jesus saying it based on my study of scripture, it's a Romans 14. It's a *dialogismos*. It's an opinion. It's a conclusion that I've drawn based on study of scripture and walking with Jesus, but this is not -- this is not the words of Jesus. He never addressed

this topic, but here's the conclusion that I've come to about the sort of thing Jesus might have said.

TRAVIS: So one thing I keep thinking about is, I grew up in the church and I've noticed I have a lot of baggage with the way I think about scripture and the modern questions I approach it with. I think if you come from outside of the church and you're coming in and you're coming into the Bible for the first time, you're still going to have a lot of baggage because you've maybe heard things about scripture, so I keep thinking of one of my favorite jokes that I think will be able to help us here. Are you ready?

WES: Okay. I love when a joke can help us.

TRAVIS: So forget everything you know about bread. Now let me tell you about this great new product: It's called bread.

No, but I keep thinking about the fact that --

WES: I honestly never heard that joke before.

TRAVIS: It's a good one. I keep thinking about how -- I remember like my early 20s, I started trying to forget all the baggage I had about -- I've been reading Jesus' words, you know, I've been hearing them read to me since I was a little, little kid, and I remember realizing -- I wish I could remember the specific passage that made it jump out to me, but I remember realizing, at some point, like, I think Jesus just told a joke there, or Jesus was being sarcastic, or something like that. I realized, when I read those red letters in the Bible, I'm reading it as coldly and as sacredly as I can.

WES: Yeah, with a certain tone.

TRAVIS: Right. And every time I read the gospels, I've sapped all personality out of Jesus. And, again, I think it's out -- for me, somebody

who grew up in the church and has been taught from a very, very young age to be respectful of these texts, there's a good intention behind it, but I was missing things that he was saying and I was missing points that he was making in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout his ministry because I had all of these presuppositions and I had all of these blinders on when I read. And then, as the years have gone by, I've started asking myself how much of scripture have I been doing that to? And I've found that every time I go into a new area of scripture with that idea of, okay, I know I know this story, I know I know the Genesis text, I know I know the Israelites leaving Egypt, but let me forget about all of that and try to read it for the first time, and that alone -- I mean, to go back to the point that you were making about absorbing it, not going in with as many questions and just absorbing scripture, it's harder. It's harder to read scripture that way.

WES: Oh, sure, absolutely. Some of the things that can help -- one thing that can help is reading it in a different translation. Sometimes to read it in a fresh translation can really help. I will say -- because I know we're running out of time, but I will say that I think it's really important to read scripture in community. Scripture was never intended -- let me go back. That might be a little strong. Scripture, historically, was not read individually and in isolation. Scripture was read, historically, in community, whether that was in the synagogue, whether that was in the entire nation of Israel gathered together reading from the law of Moses, or whether that was even a family reading together or reciting scripture together, or in 1st century churches, these letters. The letter to the church at Ephesus, it wasn't like, "Okay, let me Xerox all of this and I'll send it home with you tonight, and y'all read

Paul's letter and come back next week and tell us what you thought about it." That's not the way it worked. People would come with these letters to the church community and they would read it out loud, and I'm sure next week they would do the same thing. Let's read that letter from Paul again. And they would continue to read it and ask questions about it and think through it together as a community.

Not only do we have the modern equivalent of that in church, we have these communities with whom to read and digest scripture to think through. This is incredibly important, to ask -- I'm not saying don't ask our modern questions. Ask your modern questions, recognize that they're modern questions, recognize they may be in modern categories, but think through it together as a church community. But not only that, we also are in communion with 2,000 years of Christians, many of whom have written down their thoughts on scripture. So if you're asking a question for the very first time that no other Christian has ever asked, chances are it's not the best question in the world. That's harsh, but chances are --

TRAVIS: We've had a lot of time to be talking about this.

WES: -- either it's not a great question or somebody has already asked it, and if they have, it doesn't mean that they came to the right conclusions, but thinking through it with them might be incredibly helpful. Ask, "How did Christians in the 2nd century think about this? How did Christians in the 5th century or the 6th century or the 12th century -- how did they think through these things?" And if we have some of their writings -- again, it's not scripture, but many of these are people we would accept as our brothers and sisters in Christ. Think through it with them. Allow them to teach you,

here's how we thought through it. Because what that does is, you are -- you're adding a third point into -- it's like if you're measuring something, you need multiple points on the board. If you're going to make a cut, if you're going to make a straight line, you need to find multiple points on the board where you can connect those dots. And so if you only have one point or maybe two points, it's probably not going to be as accurate as if you can get three or four or five or six points, and then you're going to know exactly where that line should be.

And so when we read scripture, finding other points of reference -- because if you can read somebody who lived, I don't know, in the 15th century or whatever, they have a very different context than the 1st century Christians, but they also have a very different context from you. So reading Christians from other cultures in other places at other times who spoke other languages, that could help us to sort of figure out, what is timeless here? What are the timeless principles here? What are the big-picture things that I should be focusing on, and what are my sort of minute details, minute categories that really don't represent timeless truth and big important things that I need to be focused on? And so it can help us to sort through what's big picture and what's small picture.

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.