

Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast
Being Proud of Your Christianity

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

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

WES: Hey, Travis. How are you?

TRAVIS: I'm doing very well. How about yourself?

WES: I'm doing very well.

TRAVIS: We have a new question from a listener today.

WES: Yeah, from a teenage listener. I'm just shocked and happy that we have listeners that are under the age of 30.

TRAVIS: I'm psyched about that, and it's a very, very good question.

WES: I can't wait to tell my children that there are actually teenagers that are listening to our podcast.

TRAVIS: This one is for them. You can get them to listen to the 'cast. I'll go ahead and read the question. "I was wondering if you could talk about teenagers and being proud of being a Christian. I know a lot of teenagers these days hide the fact that they are Christian or lie and say they aren't because they fear they'll lose their friends or be made fun of. I know personally I struggle with this because, from time to time, religion comes into the conversation, and I know a lot of teenagers, and some adults, fear that we judge based on their religious beliefs."

WES: Okay. Great, great question, and so shout-out to Olivia, and thank

you, Olivia, for sending in that question. It's a fantastic question. And I think -- you know, it's interesting she started off by saying, "I was wondering if you could talk about teenagers and being proud of being a Christian," and I was thinking, well, I think she means not ashamed --

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: -- of being a Christian. But even, like, that word "proud," I was thinking about that, and thinking should we be proud to be a Christian? And it reminded me of what Paul said. I just finished preaching about this, about boasting in Christ, and there is one thing that we can be proud of, one thing that we can boast in, and that is that we have been saved by Jesus. Like that is our one boast. Not in anything we've done or how smart we are or how good we are, but what Jesus has done for us. And so the idea and the truth that we belong to Jesus -- I think she's right. I think we should be proud of that fact, not in a self-righteous way, but in a righteousness that comes from what Jesus has done for us kind of a way.

But I really want to start this conversation by asking sort of the flip side of it. Why is it that teens -- and I think she's right. She says "some adults," and I think it's a widespread thing. Why is it that, in our culture, that Christianity is seen as something that you should be ashamed of, that is shameful? So let's kind of talk about that for a second. In fact, even that idea of honor and shame, I think, is an important concept. I may link a blog series that I did on honor and shame. But what do you think about why Christians -- because you're a lot closer to the teenage side of the scale than I am, but as a young adult, somebody who's spent time on the West Coast -- which probably gives you a different perspective than Texas.

TRAVIS: That was primarily my experience with this kind of a discussion because I grew up pretty well surrounded by Christians. I mean, I had worked with all kinds of people, but, you know, I was homeschooled, so homeschool activities and sporting events, most of that was around other Christians.

WES: Went to a Christian university.

TRAVIS: Went to a Christian school, yeah. So, really, my experience with this was, like you said, living in LA and being around Hollywood types. And I remember being kind of blindsided by the fact that -- like I was sure it was a myth that, like, people in LA had this, like, prejudice against Christians. Like if you were an outspoken Christian, then you were somehow less than; you were somehow stupid, or you had something to be ashamed of. And I pretty quickly experienced, you know, some awkward conversations with people. I would say the encouraging thing that I --

WES: Let me -- this is going to turn into an interview. How would that come up in conversation? Like how did it come up? And the first few times, you said you were surprised --

TRAVIS: Oh, yeah.

WES: -- so how did it -- was it just something -- you were just talking about life and you mentioned your faith, or they asked you about it, or do you remember like a specific time when -- one of the first times that it came up and that you realized and were shocked that people actually looked down on you?

TRAVIS: I know one way that myself and -- there's a good friend of mine who is here in Dallas now, but he's still, to this day, an actor and works in

LA, and he said -- we both had the experience of saying to somebody -- they're talking about life, and you say, "Well, I'm going to pray on that for you." And I've known plenty of non-Christians that are appreciative of that, and I know they're non-Christian, or maybe I don't, but they -- eventually I find out, and they were fine with me praying for them. They understand the sentiment behind it, but there's times where people are offended.

WES: Wow. So you would tell somebody, "I'll pray for you," and they were like, "Please don't"?

TRAVIS: Yeah, "Don't." They don't want anything associated with the Christian God, and that was the part that I really believed was a myth. I understand, you know, people not wanting to be Christians or not even having a good opinion of Christians, but actually being opposed to these self-evidently good parts of the Christian life -- like I'm going to spend time thinking about you and going to my God and offering up a prayer on your behalf. Like you don't have to believe in my God for me to do that.

WES: Right. I don't believe in leprechauns, but if somebody said, "I believe that leprechauns cure diseases and I'm going to talk to my leprechaun friends on your behalf" --

TRAVIS: I'd be like, it won't hurt.

WES: -- I would think it was weird, and I would think, "I wish you wouldn't," I guess, but yeah, I wouldn't tell them, "Please don't do that."

TRAVIS: There's almost like -- the lack of politeness around it was, I think, maybe the shocking thing, that there was an actual antagonism, not just a disagreement.

WES: Yeah. So people that prided themselves on tolerance and kindness,

and love for neighbor, probably even, but would be openly hostile or antagonized by you saying that you would pray for them?

TRAVIS: Right, because the Christian God is associated with all -- you know, all the evils to them.

WES: Okay. So let's talk about that. So like what sorts of evils? Are we talking like sexual ethics? Are we talking about, like, Crusades? Are we talking about bigotry? What sorts of things?

TRAVIS: I think if you delve deep into it, people always bring up the Crusades or the Inquisition, which are -- you know, it's rough.

WES: Sure. Right, right. We do have to talk about that eventually, yeah.

TRAVIS: But I think, in my experience, it mainly comes down to the sexual-ethic side, particularly things like with homosexuality. There's a very staunch division that, you know, those things cannot coexist, and, obviously, that's a larger conversation in and of itself, but if you're gay, like you don't want anything to do with the Christian God. You don't want anything to do with the people that have an ethic that might intrude on your lifestyle.

WES: Yeah. Well, that's so interesting, and I'm wondering if that's where it would get to, and I'm not sure, you know, if a person finds themselves in a high school here or a middle school here and they feel that same hostility, but I would assume that a lot of it has to do with that. It's not necessarily, well, you don't believe in Darwin's theory; you don't believe in evolution; or you don't believe -- you reject the Big Bang. I think maybe there was a time when Christians were sort of rejected or looked down upon. You mentioned the word "stupid" earlier. I think there was a time when that was probably the sentiment, that if you were looked down on for being a Christian, it was

from an academic standpoint.

TRAVIS: Right. Creationism versus evolution. Intellectualism, yeah.

WES: Right, exactly. And so I think that's probably true in some circles -- some academic circles, where you would sort of be looked down on because you're unscientific or you reject these sort of presumed theories and things like that, but I think now the general sentiment that is sort of anti-Christian or hostile towards Christianity probably has more to do with sexual ethics than probably anything else -- sexuality and gender.

And, you know, to me, on the one hand, I think that this could be surprising to a lot of Christians because, to your earlier point, there's this assumption that we live in a fairly -- when I say "fairly," I don't mean "relatively." I mean fair, like that it's fair in the sense that our culture supposes itself to be the kind of place where we are fairly pluralistic, where everyone can do whatever they want to do. "As long as you're not hurting me, then you can do or be whatever you want to be, and you can identify as whatever you want to identify with." And that is especially true amongst progressive-type people that would make those sorts of claims, that you could be and identify as whatever you want to identify as.

Well, then we would turn around and say, "Well, can't I identify as Christian? Like can't that be my identity? Can't that be what I choose to believe and do and practice? And if you can choose to be and do and practice what you want, then how come I can't choose to be and do and practice what I want if what I want is Christianity? How come my identity is not protected and defended the way that a sexual-minority or gender-minority type of identity would be protected? Why is that any

different from the perspective of a person who claims that everyone can be whatever they want to be? And I think that that sort of seeming -- it is a contradiction. It's a double standard, and I think that it's going to surprise people, if they get outside of the Bible Belt -- or they get outside of sort of a certain demographic, even, within the Bible Belt. To the listener's question, this is high school here. Like this is Bible Belt. We're in Dallas, Texas, and young people are facing this right now.

TRAVIS: You can drive five minutes from where we're recording this and find this sentiment very strongly.

WES: Absolutely. And it's interesting that sort of the progressive mindset would defend not only identity around gender or sexuality, especially if we're talking minority views or minority identities, but also -- we talked right before we started recording about the number of Hindus and Muslims and even atheists that live in our community. And I assume that even though they wouldn't necessarily agree with all of the perspectives of their Muslim neighbors, they would defend a Muslim person's right to be a Muslim, and it wouldn't offend them if they said, "I'm going to pray to Allah on your behalf." They would say, "Thank you for that." But it's something specific towards Christianity and the Christian God.

TRAVIS: I really think that that -- my suspicion is that that is about power, because I think Christians -- you know, we've had a real good run. I mean, speaking of the Crusades, it was like Christianity did become associated -- I wouldn't call it Christianity, what sometimes led to the power that was garnered, but it was associated with rising power for a long, long time; and certainly, in this country, it's been heavily a part of tradition and politics, and

so I think Christians are associated with like, "Well, we're not going to be tolerant of you because it's your time." Like, "It's your time to feel the sting of intolerance." That's my suspicion.

WES: Yeah, absolutely. So there is a bit of vindictiveness that's part of this conversation, that it's not just about our views, because we would share, at least in theory -- not to say every practicing Muslim or every practicing Jewish person would have the same views on sexuality and these kinds of things, but a lot of religious people would have very similar types of views, but there's something specific to Christianity that raises people's frustration and anger towards us, and I think you're exactly right. I think it has been the fact that, in the West, Christianity has enjoyed a privileged position, and that's changing and shifting, and so that's beginning to go away, and there's -- now it's sort of -- the pendulum has swung, and it's this anger and frustration.

And I think, too -- I think another thing to realize -- and I say all of this because I think we need to be really clear about the world that we're navigating, and especially our young people -- again, to the listener's question, in high school and middle school and colleges, if people are moving to the East Coast or the West Coast about how difficult -- or even in the workplace, even in Dallas, how difficult it is to be a Christian in these types of environments. Part of the reason for that is that we have made the idea of "self" absolutely into an idol. I even heard the term the other day on a podcast, "the idolatry of identity," the idea that who I feel that I am, my internal sense of self -- and, again, this applies to sexuality and gender and to just a whole lot of things.

I recently finished a very interesting book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. Excellent book. If you kind of want to understand where are we, how did we get here, this idea of the way that people think about themselves, it's a really helpful, historical book. It's kind of rough. It's a little bit rough just as far as sort of the dogmatism of the book, but I think it's really helpful to kind of understand why, for so many modern people, especially young people and, especially, again, outside of the Bible Belt, there is this perspective about the self, that that is absolutely a god. It is absolutely their idol. And this book that I just finished, it calls it the therapeutic self, and the whole idea is that authenticity is one of the most important things to modern people. And by "authenticity," what they mean is who I really am on the inside needs to be expressed on the outside, and I will not allow myself to be shamed by someone else who makes me feel bad about expressing on the outside who I feel I am on the inside. And I think that's exactly why Christianity becomes a target, because Christianity imposes restrictions on what we do on the outside. It says, yes, we have feelings on the inside. We have desires, we have passions, we have wants, but not all of those things are good. Not all of those things should be affirmed. Not all of those things should be expressed. Some of those things should be denied. The idea of self-denial is seen as neurosis. It's seen as something that's bad and harmful, like you should never deny yourself, but Christianity is all about self-denial.

Now, I do think Christians have gone too far in trying to insist that everyone else deny themselves. We need to focus on denying ourselves and taking the log out of our own eye before we start worrying about the speck

in someone else's eye. But Christianity is seen as enforcing these outside rules and restrictions and keeping people from being able to express their authentic self, and they -- so many young people today, the modern person, sees that as hypocrisy. The inability to express their inner self, their authentic self, their true self, they see that as being inauthentic, being a hypocrite, being a liar. They see it as a matter of morality to be able to express on the outside what they feel on the inside.

TRAVIS: I heard a great -- I've heard several versions of a great perspective on, like, the messenger and the message not always being in simpatico, and I heard somebody tell a story one time about their -- their father passed away, and as they're sort of handling his affairs and dealing with his estate in the aftermath, they found some things, and they weren't -- it wasn't anything, you know, too horrible, but they found some things where he would never have advised them to -- his kids to get involved with that he did. And, you know, that hurts a lot of people when that happens, whether they're alive or they've passed away, but the perspective this person telling the story had on it was really interesting to me, that you could call it hypocrisy or you could call it -- he's trying to point you in a better direction.

And so to relate that to this idea that, you know, well, Christians have the same sinful nature and struggle with the same sins as everybody else, it's like -- like you said, man, that's something we've got to work on. That's something I've got to work on. But at the same time, it's like when we talk -- I think a good talking point for us in relationship to the culture is, like, the reason we preach about values, the reason we talk about sin and turning away from it even though we struggle with it is -- you know, you say this as

a preacher. I've heard a lot of preachers and teachers say this: "I'm talking to you guys as much as me."

WES: Oh, right. Yeah.

TRAVIS: And I always like it when somebody says that because it reminds us that we're all in this together. And even though sometimes the message and the messenger aren't the same, the ultimate goal is we're trying to aim everybody up. But I do agree with what you said, that, you know, starting with ourselves is obviously the Christ-centered way to do it.

WES: Yeah. Well, there's two things there. I think that you point out two good things there. One is the fact that we haven't always lived up to the standard that we've preached, and sometimes we've been like the people that brought the woman caught in adultery and we're trying to stone someone else when we actually have sins ourselves that need to be repented of, and the world is right in pointing that out, that we need to -- you know, he who is without sin cast the first stone.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: On the other hand, there's also something fundamental about our message that the world disagrees with. The idea that we are preaching a message that says, "I have certain desires, which not only am I not going to act upon, but you shouldn't act upon your desires, either" -- they see that -- not just my preaching or teaching or our failure to live up to our certain standard, they see the standard itself --

TRAVIS: As wrong.

WES: -- as being harmful, as being -- as something bad and immoral.

TRAVIS: To use religious language on their behalf -- because that's always

helped me understand the culture, to use religious language -- it's a sin to contradict your identity, your self, your feelings.

WES: Yes, that's exactly right. They see that as a sin, to contradict their feelings. They see salvation as the ability to be able to be the person on the outside that they are on the inside. They see that as salvation. We see that as toxic, as self-destructive, so there is an incompatibility with our ideology and theirs.

TRAVIS: And to do things without shame.

WES: Yes, absolutely, because there's that idea that I am this person on the inside, and when I live that out and you don't affirm me or accept me, then you're making me feel ashamed of who I really am. Now, what they're doing, though, is they're turning the shame around and they're saying, "You are not going to fit in in our culture. We're going to disallow you to be part of our culture as long as you hold to that ideology that won't accept me or affirm me. And if you won't accept me for who I am" -- I mean, they use language like, "This is violence towards me," like, "You're being violent towards me because you won't accept me for who I am." It's not enough that we be kind, nice, that "You have to accept me for who I am because, otherwise, you're ignoring me; you're denying my existence; you're shaming me."

TRAVIS: You have to live in their reality with them.

WES: Right, absolutely. Because, again, they feel like their inner self, their feelings, their mindset, their hopes and dreams and wants -- and, again, we all have those. We all have an internal self. But the Christian message says the internal self is as likely wrong as it is right and that it needs to be denied

and that we need a new self, not a true self, that we're moving towards a new self in Christ, and not what some would refer to as the true self or the authentic self.

And so they look at our message of self-denial as harmful. Not only harmful to ourselves, but also harmful to them and that it's keeping them from being saved. And by "saved," they mean being able to express their inner self, so I think just understanding that is really helpful. When we come back from the break, we'll talk about how do we navigate a world where we're being shamed for what we believe.

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. So we keep using this word "shame," and I think it's really important for us to define "shame" because I think it's so important for this conversation. I like to define "shame" in contrast with "guilt" because guilt and shame typically get used synonymously, but they're actually a little bit different. Guilt is I've done something wrong; shame is I don't feel like I belong. That's how I remember it. And so shame is about belonging; it's about acceptance, which is, again, why, in our culture, shame is also associated with "Something is wrong with me." And there's a lot of good

work that's gone on with shame and how shame is toxic and how it's harmful, but, again, we have come to internalize this idea that you are your deepest feelings, your deepest wants, your deepest desires. That's who you really are, and we have come to accept that people around you should accept you for what you really feel and what you really think and what you really want and what you really desire, that people should accept you as that version of yourself, and if they don't, then they're bad because they're shaming you and they're not allowing you at their table because they won't accept you for who you are.

Now, I will say, obviously, there have been tons of times where there has been a toxic, destructive use of shame even amongst Christian people. You can look back at the first-century world and the people who were tax collectors and, quote-unquote, sinners. They were all being shamed, not because of what they felt on the inside, but because of what they had done, and because of what they had done, because they had collected taxes for Rome, because they had prostituted themselves, because they had -- whatever they had done, they were rejected by the community and they weren't allowed to sit at their table anymore. They weren't allowed to be part of the community anymore, and they were shaming them.

Shame is meant to be coercive, and, again, in our culture today that says, "You have to accept me for who I am," when they feel like -- when a person feels like they're being shamed, they feel like they're being told, "You have to conform to our expectations in order to be part of our group." Now, we could talk about the good uses of that and the bad uses of that, but specifically now, we're talking about as Christians. As Christians, Olivia is

asking the question. "I'm being shamed. We, as Christians, are being shamed." Now we are being told that "Because you hold to this ideology of self-denial, you hold to this ideology of sin, you hold to this ideology of repentance and denying your feelings and your desires, and you make us feel ashamed by your Christian community over here, now we're going to shame you." And, again, there's a little bit of this vindictiveness. That's not always true, but there is some vindictiveness here. And so there is this shame now that's being directed towards Christians that says, "If you're a Christian, especially an outspoken Christian, somebody who makes it obvious that they think that their way is the right way, that Jesus is the only way, that this is the right way to live their life, and you try to proselytize and make other people into Christians, then you can't sit at our table. You are not welcome here because you're one of those kind of Christians, and we don't want to have anything to do with you. It's fine if you kind of keep your religion to yourself. If it makes you feel better to pray, if it makes you feel better to go to church, that's fine; you can do that. But if you make this part of your public identity and you bring this out, there's too much -- this is triggering for me."

TRAVIS: There's going to be consequences.

WES: Right. And so you maybe -- again, if you work in someplace like Hollywood, it may mean that you don't get jobs. It may mean that you don't get to participate in things that other people do. You can't network the way other people network. It can have consequences in high schools. It can have consequences all over the place. And this is a type of shaming because it is intended, whether consciously or subconsciously, to be coercive, to say,

"You need to give up your archaic, bigoted, oppressive ideology or else you can't be a part of civilized society." That "You need to give up that and you need to come in with the rest of us and accept us for who we really are, and if you aren't affirming of us and aren't accepting of us" -- and, again, I'm not just talking about sexual and gender issues; I'm talking about all kinds of different ideologies that, in our modern world, it's becoming increasingly more prevalent that Christian people are shamed for being outspoken Christians. And, again, I'm not trying to give cover to Christian jerks because I hope that people understand that this podcast is all about learning to love like Jesus.

But, again, it goes back -- and this is really what I want to get to, I Peter. Read I Peter. This is exactly the type of world that the people to whom Peter was writing -- that they were living in, too. Most of our brothers and sisters throughout history have been shamed by their communities. But to your earlier point, Christians have enjoyed a position of privilege in the Western world for so long, it's shocking to us to be shamed, to be publicly shamed. We use the word "cancel" as if it's something new, but being canceled is nothing new. The Pharisees were canceling tax collectors a long time ago. Plenty of Christian communities canceled people for their behavior, for whatever they've done, and now Christians, just like in the first century, are being canceled. You can't work. You can't be part of the community. Your friends are going to disown you because you're a follower of Jesus.

Peter writes this letter to Christians who are absolutely shocked that this is happening to them, and Peter says don't be surprised. Don't be

surprised when this happens. This is exactly what's going to happen. And he asks a question -- this is I Peter 3, starting in verse 13, probably a passage many are familiar with. He says, "Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?" And, I mean, that's a legitimate question, and it's true all over the world, even on the West Coast and on the East Coast, that for the most part, if you love your neighbor, you're kind, you're generous, you're helpful, people are going to appreciate that. They may think you're weird. They may think that you're an oddball, but they're going to appreciate that. Nobody's going to cancel you or shame you because you're zealous for what is good. But Peter is also a realist, and he says, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

We often quote that, "be ready to give a defense," and think that he's talking about people that are just curious about Christianity. "Oh, Christianity. Tell me about that." He's specifically talking about people that want to shame you, want to cancel you, want to laugh at you, mock you, disown you, kick you out of the family, kick you out of the organization, the business, the family business, whatever it was. They were suffering these kinds of things in the first century. It was before they were being fed to the lions. It was before they were being impaled. Those things would come later. But they're being mocked; they're being shamed. They're being told, "You don't belong. As long as you worship this Jesus, as long as you don't worship our gods and do things the way that we do things, or you don't hold

to our traditions, you're out. We don't want to have anything to do with you." And he says when they ask you a reason for the hope that's within you -- "Why do you keep doing this? Like even after everything you've lost, why do you keep doing this?" -- be prepared to give a defense, and do it with gentleness and respect. And so he tells them over and over again in I Peter, "Don't be surprised when they reject you, and don't feel like something is broken, like oops, God messed up. This wasn't supposed to be the way it was. Expect this kind of treatment. It's not always going to happen. You don't have to have like a martyr complex, but you do have to realize there's going to be times where you're hated for doing what's right and good, and when they ask you, "Why do you hold on to this? Why do you keep doing this?" be prepared to give an answer, and do it with gentleness and respect. He says, "...having a good conscience, so that, when you're slandered" -- *when* you're slandered -- "those who revile" -- that means to, like, abuse you verbally -- "revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." Like, eventually, they will be put to shame for the shame that they're trying to cast on you. "For it's better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil."

So, essentially, he says, throughout the book of I Peter, "Do good and be prepared to tell people why you're doing it. Do it in the name of Jesus. Don't be surprised and don't allow their shame to coerce you into doing what's wrong." And I think this gets to the heart of our listener's question, that there is this temptation to just say nothing; keep your faith to yourself, because that's what they want you to do. They want you to be ashamed of your religion so that you either don't talk about it or you don't actually

practice it. And, I mean, I'll be absolutely honest. I didn't live in a sort of like progressive type of culture where sexual ethics were frowned upon, or whatever, or I was shamed for being a Christian. Most kids at my high school would have claimed to be Christian, but if I didn't use the profanity that they used, if I didn't go to the parties that they went to, if I didn't sleep around the way that they did -- if I didn't do these kinds of things, or at least act like I was okay with it, and laugh at the jokes that they told and sort of added my own colorful whatever in there, then they would mock me for being self-righteous or a goody-goody or holier than thou, and the intention of that type of shaming is to coerce you to go along, because Peter says they're surprised when you don't join them in the flood of debauchery. They're surprised when you don't go along with them, and they want you to go along. And in order to go along, you have to change what you believe; you have to change what you practice; you have to change all of these truths and abandon those things and go along with the crowd. And Peter is encouraging them, "Stay strong. Do good. Love these people. Be gentle and kind to them. Be respectful towards them, but do not allow them to coerce you with their shame."

TRAVIS: Yeah. You know, another piece of encouragement, something that's really been helpful to me on this topic and, really, especially the last couple years where there have been -- people have been getting more and more -- you mentioned canceling, and people, in general, have just been getting more and more heated. You know, we don't have debates anymore; it's war.

WES: Not the free exchange of ideas.

TRAVIS: It's like somebody is going to fly off the handle, if not everybody. And one thing I've been reminded of, whether it's my faith or it's an opinion I hold, or -- is if I'm sure of it -- if I'm sure of what I believe in, then I'm perfectly comfortable with discussing differences of opinion. I'm not offended at all when somebody talks about their Muslim faith or their Buddhist faith or their Jewish faith. I'm actually fascinated by it. But I'm able to be that way because I'm sold on this Jesus guy. Like I think I'm going to keep going along with him. And so I think -- and whether it's somebody of another faith or it's somebody in the secular culture that is offended by the sexual ethics that you hold is offended by the way you want to live your life, and even if you're not outwardly dismissive and judgmental towards people, that there's an implicit understanding between both parties that you're not in approval of the way they choose to live their life, the way they identify themselves. If somebody is like that and they are antagonistic in a way that is sometimes mean and nasty and -- I mean, I remember being a kid. Kids sometimes can be really mean, and adults can sometimes be really mean.

WES: Oh, for sure.

TRAVIS: And if somebody's doing that, that doesn't necessarily mean you're right all the time, but I think it's a good marker. It's a good marker because I know when I'm sure of something and when I feel like I've got a good foundation in something, particularly my faith, I'm perfectly open to people objecting to it, to questioning it, to questioning me about it. You know, like Peter says, "Have a defense ready." Like I'm not going to get it right every time. I'm going to slip up on my words, but, man, I've had some

great conversations with people where I've stopped and gone, like, I didn't even know I had that in me. That must be the Spirit, because I know I'm not that smart or that eloquent.

But I mentioned earlier that, you know, when I was in LA, there would be conversation starters. You know, sometimes it would get awkward. The flip side of that that was actually encouraging to me was the fact that -- and this happened all the time with this ring that I wear. My dad got me this ring. It's got a cross on it. It's pretty subtle. It's not in anybody's face, but people would see it and everybody would question to what level did I mean it -- like did I mean in wearing this. You know, was it just like a decoration thing, like a fashion statement?

WES: Like the cross tattoo that kind of looked cool, but...

TRAVIS: Right. And so then the conversation would start, and sometimes I'd have an awkward discussion where somebody was like, "Well, what are you doing here? What are you doing in LA?" And then sometimes I would find, like, secret Christians, people who -- and I had several people -- this happened several times, where people would say, like, "You know, I don't get to talk to anybody about my faith" --

WES: Wow.

TRAVIS: -- "because I've had it just go wrong so many times." And that was like -- it became like almost like a self-selecting process, where I would naturally kind of meet people who were serious about their faith; and people that were antagonistic towards my faith, you know, we got that discussion out of the way early. I didn't have to be friends with them for a while and then the eruption. It was like we could have sort of a mildly

awkward discussion as strangers. And then I could be -- you know, I've also known a lot of people who've had those heated interactions and awkward discussions with people who are antagonistic towards their faith, and then something happens and the person who was heated and the person who was hateful about Christianity towards that person, they end up coming back when something happens in their life because they remember there's somebody they met that they could count on. I know I've heard many stories like that. So anyway, just a couple, hopefully, encouraging things on that front.

WES: Yeah, absolutely. And, I think, going back to that idea of that confidence that you can have that -- I often think about Hebrews 12. Jesus despised the shame of the cross, meaning that he wasn't coerced by the shame of the world. They tried to shame Jesus into silence. They tried to shame him into denying who he was, but yet he had this confidence to go through with it even though they humiliated him in the most shameful way possible with the cross, and he despised their shame. Not that he despised them. He didn't hate them; he died for them. But he despised their shame; he wasn't going to be coerced by it.

It's the idea that you just mentioned, that it's okay -- if you don't like me because I'm a Christian, I'm perfectly okay with that. And the only way that we can have that confidence, that we can boast in Christ, is that we recognize that Jesus takes away our shame, that we have a place where we do belong. I belong in the courts of God. I belong in the city of God. I belong at Abraham's table. I belong at Isaac's table. I belong at Jacob's table. I belong at David's table. I belong at Jesus' table. This is what the

Hebrew writer is laying out in Hebrews 11. He's saying you are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses. You are surrounded by all of these people who did exactly what you're doing right now. They lived in a world where they weren't accepted. They lived in a world where they were rejected. They lived in a world where they were shamed, but yet they had the confidence to walk by faith and not by sight because they knew they did belong. They belonged in the city of God.

And that's what Christians today have to recognize. It's okay if I live in LA and I'm not accepted, because God accepts me. The church accepts me. Jesus accepts me. The Holy Spirit lives in me, and so to know I do belong -- the people in the culture, in the world, they have to be affirmed. They have to be accepted. They have to have people say, "You're good enough. You belong. You can sit at our table," because they have to have someone that says that to them. So do we. We have to have somebody who says that to us. We have to have somebody who will take away our shame, but we just have to stop looking at the people around us to take away our shame. I don't have to be accepted by any of you. If you reject me, okay. I'm sorry. I would love for us to get along. I'd love for us to sit at the same table. But if you shame me, I know that God accepts me. I know that God welcomes me. I know that the Spirit lives within me, and so I can have the confidence to be shamed in the world because I know I belong to him.

Hebrews 13 -- again, this is what the whole book of Hebrews is about. It's what the whole book of I Peter is about. Hebrews 13 says, "Therefore, let us go to him [Jesus] outside the camp and bear the reproach that he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to

come." He says it's okay if you don't fit in in earthly Jerusalem. Earthly Jerusalem isn't our home. Our home is the heavenly Jerusalem. That's the city that is to come. You have a home. You have a city, but it's not this city.

So if Dallas doesn't accept you, if LA doesn't accept you, if Washington, D.C. doesn't accept you, if New York doesn't accept you, if Tulsa doesn't accept you, if you're not accepted by your community, who cares? You belong in the city of God. And so God's people need to be constantly reminded, "You do belong. You do have a place. Your shame is taken away," because we feel it every day, and we're social creatures. We want to have a table to sit at. We want to be accepted. We want to belong. And eventually, if we don't feel like we belong, we will compromise. I've often said that the desire to belong can lead us to do wrong. We will eventually do wrong in order to belong, so we have to be reminded, "You do belong. You have a place where you are accepted and you are loved because of what Jesus has done for you." And then that allows us to go back to the things we were talking about before: Self-denial, to live not conformed to the world but transformed by the renewing of our minds. Not to try to be our authentic self or true self or express our inner self, but to allow Jesus, through the Spirit, to transform us because we belong at his table. And it's rejecting the world's shame and saying, "I will not be coerced by your shame" so that we can have the glory and the honor that comes from God.

This is what Jesus rebuked the people of his day for. Who do you want to honor you? Everybody is looking for honor. Everybody is looking for acceptance. Everybody is looking for affirmation. There's nobody that -- I mean, people say all the time, "I think for myself. I don't need anybody to

affirm me." It's like, yes, you do. Everybody does. We're social creatures. We need someone to accept us and affirm us. The question is, are you looking for God's honor and glory and acceptance, or are you looking for the world's acceptance and honor and glory?

The people around us, have compassion on them. Have mercy on them. They want you to affirm them because they want to be loved. They want to be accepted. They don't have anyone else to accept them. They need people to accept them, and we have someone to accept us. It's God. And so we can have the confidence to say, I'm going to be who he calls me to be. I'm going to live out this life of a disciple because he accepts me and he loves me and I'm treasured and I belong to him, and so we don't have to have the affirmation or acceptance of the people around us the way that others do because we have the acceptance and affirmation of God.

TRAVIS: And I think, to your point you just made about, you know, if people are -- they want you to accept them, they want you to make them feel like they belong -- that they belong, that's, I think, a really important thing to understand with people. When someone is sinning and asking you to participate, it's like, remember that we're image-bearers of God. We're not meant to do those things. So you mentioned the difference between guilt and shame, and I'm thankful that I feel guilt.

WES: Oh, absolutely.

TRAVIS: It would be far more terrifying to not feel it. And I have a suspicion -- I can't get inside their heads, but I have a suspicion that when people are, again, antagonistic towards somebody about their faith, it's like, yeah, because they're insecure about it. They're insecure about their own

lifestyle and their own decisions. And it goes back to what I mentioned before about being secure, like we -- I don't always do things perfect, but I know who's got my back and I know who I'm trying to emulate, and this explosion of -- like you said -- I loved the word you used, "authenticity," that that's become the most important virtue. This explosion of identity and the emphasis placed on it, and affirming and being affirmed, it's -- they're searching for a god. They're searching for someone to accept them and have their back.

WES: Yeah, the same thing we all desire.

TRAVIS: Yeah. And I'm particularly thinking -- you know, as we kind of get to the end here, I'm particularly thinking about somebody who's young, somebody like Olivia writing this question. It's not -- I wouldn't say it's easy now. I don't know how you feel. We're kind of staggered from -- I'm not a teenager; I'm in my 20s. You're a little bit older than me. I wouldn't say it's easy now to not be so shaken by, "Oh, I shared my faith and they weren't all that psyched about it," but I do know it was harder when I was younger.

WES: Oh, I struggled mightily. I fell away because of this. I mean, I absolutely apostatized because of this. I fell away from the church. I still went to church, but I conformed because I wanted desperately to fit in. And part of that, I think -- not to interrupt your thought, but part of that, I think, is -- what makes it easier over time is surrounding ourselves with flesh-and-blood people who are accepted by God and accept me in the name of God, and so we have an actual community to belong to. It's one thing to just theoretically say, "Well, if I confess Jesus before people, he will confess me before his Father, so I'm accepted by him." Yeah, that's great, and I need

that, and that needs to be my ultimate confidence, but it's really hard to actually live that out unless I have the embodied people of God, the church, who actually bring me in and accept me and love me and affirm me and give me a place in community so that I know my shame has been taken away. I know that I'm accepted. I know that I'm loved, not just in theory, but in reality. And that's why it's so important for us to help people that are struggling with sin and temptation that are looking for acceptance. They're looking for community, but they're looking for it in all the wrong places and in all the wrong ways. We need to show them a place where they can belong and bring them into the church and into God's acceptance.

TRAVIS: And on that note, the discussion about identity -- the explosion of the amount of identities people claim to have is remarkable, but it reminds me of the fact that not only do we have an identity in -- our identity is primarily in Christ, and you said it before, less of self, more of thee, or something like that. But I also think it's interesting the way that we talk about the identity in Christ, where we're children of God. Like there are identities associated with being in Christ's family, and first of all, we call it a family. We're children of God. We're brothers and sisters in Christ. God is our father. Like it's what we're -- you're not just looking for like this socialite experience where you have like -- there's strangers and acquaintances and -- you know, you're not trying to build this layered life where -- you're looking for family. That's what I'm ultimately getting at. You're looking for the kinds of relationships that emulate what a family is supposed to be like, and that's that brothers and sisters in Christ is those people that -- they'll affirm you, but they'll also call you out. They'll

encourage you.

WES: Right, as any community does. As any community does.

TRAVIS: And so I think the explosion of identities seems to me -- and I don't think it's any wonder why this is, also, I think, another big part of what's going wrong in our culture, is we're -- like the family -- the very concept of the family is being devalued, not just at the actual family level, but as an identity. Like because -- and it's interesting to me that throughout scripture, that is how we talk about people who are of the Lord, who are following the Lord, is it's supposed to be a family, and a family is not just somebody who affirms you; it's somebody who challenges you, corrects you, encourages you, all of those things. But that's -- it's not somebody who's just going to give you whatever identity that you desire.

WES: Yeah. And, I mean, if you go back to the first-century world, family identity was so important. It was so important what tribe you came from, what clan you came from, what nation you come from, what ethnic group you belong to. All of these things were very core to their identity, and they were being shamed. Once they started following Jesus, they were being shamed by the communities that they valued so much. They were being kicked out of their family, their tribe, their clan, their nation, their ethnic group. They were kicked out of those communities, so it was so important for the church to be that surrogate family, that new family, that new nation, that new ethnic group in Christ, and that we would bring one another in and remove the shame by accepting each other in Christ.

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.