

“Conversations on this Present Distress
with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Six

April 26, 2020 • Sunday Evening

This study has been a substitution from our regular Sunday evening studies due to the current distress our world is going through and the ability to not gather together on Sunday evenings currently. In this study we are answering questions you have about this current distress from a Biblical world and life view with clarity and with Gospel focus that we continue to pray is a hallmark of the ministry of Briarwood Presbyterian Church. Since this is going on much longer than we thought we plan to broaden the questions in this study even beyond the present distress.

I do want to keep in front of you the importance from Scripture the gathering of God’s people. It is given in the negative in Hebrews 10:25 which says [25] *(Do) not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* According to this verse some had made this a habit not to assemble together. So why is this so important? It is because the means of grace in the corporate gathering of God’s people in worship is where they are designed to be most effective. In your private life and family life worship you can have God’s Word and God’s Spirit is there, but there are elements in public worship that God has ordained that are undergirding your personal and family worship. Such as, the sacraments which is something the covenant community comes together for as Paul talks of the Lord’s Supper in I Corinthians 11:17–18a, which says [17] *But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. [18] For, in the first place, when you come together as a church...*

Another place in Scripture it talks about the gathering of God’s people is in Ephesians 5:19 which says [19] *addressing (speaking to) one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.* As we gather together in corporate worship we are to encourage one another and greet one another. These are all positive Biblical commands that are impossible apart from face to face contact. It is also really important for pastoral preaching in gathered worship. We don’t just put up a recorded message when God’s people meet together. It’s a pastor who has prayed through a text in light of the assembled congregation to apply it into their lives pastorally and preaching is a give and take relationship between hearer and speaker where the Spirit of God joins us together to listen for the voice of Christ as His Word is expounded.

So Bruce what do you think has risen dramatically in the world of technology during this time of shelter in place?

Bruce: I would say Facetime or Zoom where you can see someone while you talk with them.

Harry: You are right. Texting and email have certainly increased but the surprising one is the increase of phone conversations. Phone conversations before this crisis seemed to be a lot less than email or texting. The old phone call is apparently up six times more than it had been before this crisis. In one day one company is averaging 640 million phone calls and this is just one phone company. In other words, given our population people are getting on the phone three times a day. What is this telling us? It says that people need to be in communication and nothing can surpass face to face communication.

Bruce: We need the day to come quickly that we gather together for worship and one of the reasons has to do with a recent trip I made to the grocery store to get a few items. I ran into two members from the church and it ended up taking me an hour to get a few items at the grocery store due to those members taking up 54 minutes to talk with me. In that conversation at the store I think we covered most the elements you just talked about for assembling together. What tickled me was how we left the conversation when the lady said to me 'I'll call you' and I thought 'What is left to say?' People are starving for interaction and we long to be back together in corporate worship.

Harry: Here is something I find funny in this current crisis. What is the thing that people generally complain about most regarding phone calls? It is the sales call, someone soliciting a product or service and they want to end it quickly or hang up or not answer. Now, in this current crisis people tend to actually have a conversation with them. The sales people now are saying their sales are down not because people are hanging up but because they just want to talk yet still don't want to buy anything from them.

God made us for relationships, first of all with Him and secondly with each other. I would conclude our little thought here by saying God speaks to you through His Word and by His Spirit and He uses His church gathered to speak to you as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. In preaching, the Bible says that faith comes by hearing the Word (Romans 10:17) from Christ by the Spirit of God. Jesus said in John 10:27, *[27] My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* So your communication with the Lord can take place in personal and family worship but it is enhanced foundationally and pervasively in gathered worship with God's people.

Bruce: We do have a broadening of our questions and the first one goes back to the temple veil. The Gospel of Matthew 27:51 tells us the curtain was torn from top to bottom so the question is, how high, wide and thick was this veil and how did the priests get through the veil?

Harry: Because of all I had to do this week, I saw this question and had laid it aside so at the moment my answer is that I don't have the slightest idea. I do know that we have at least one more of the Q & A sessions to do so I will do some research and find out the answer. I do have an idea but I don't want to be in the business of retracting. I three sources I will into to answer this question with one being an astonishing resource concerning the temple of God. When I answer this I will go beyond this question to give you how the curtain started with the tabernacle, then what it became with the temple, what they did in the Zerubbabel temple which was much smaller, and the rebuilding of the temple by Herod in the days of Jesus and what is known as the 8th wonder of the world plus what it looked like when it was rent in two. I am now intrigued to answer this so I look forward to this.

Bruce: I would like to add to that question and would you tell us what color it was as well?

Harry: Yes, I will.

Bruce: So the next question is, what is the difference between propitiation, atonement and redemption?

Harry: I will add another word onto those three and that being expiation. The Bible that settled America was the Bible that was translated in Geneva under the oversight of John Knox and a couple of other theologians and pastors, while Knox was there as a refugee being mentored by John Calvin, before he came back and was the key figure in the Scottish Reformation. That was known as the Geneva Bible. This was of the Hebrew and Greek text translated into Latin, French and English. The last translation was in English and the final finishing of it was 1564. What was really different about the Geneva Bible was it was the first Bible with theological notes. I actually have a replication of the original Geneva Study Bible with the original notes from John Knox, Chris Goodman and all the great theologians that did that translation.

So this Bible that settled America was called the Breeches Bible and the reason it was called that was because when they were translating Genesis 3:7 where it says [7] *Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths*, they did not want to use the word loincloths. So in the Bible that first came to America they used the word 'breeches' in place of loincloths here and that's how it got its name the Breeches Bible.

On top of that Bible then came the King James Bible, but in the development of the Geneva Bible which greatly affected Shakespeare and the King James Bible there were Biblical and theological concepts that the English language did not have a word for. So they then began to invent words like atonement and propitiation to accommodate concepts that previously our English language was inadequate to accommodate. The English language is a powerful language for communication because of its force but it's not the best language for precision. The Greek language is better for this.

For instance, when we say the word 'love' and I say to Bruce, 'Hey I love you man' I don't say 'I love you' the same way to my wife even though I tell her I love her. So the tone is different in the way we communicate that to different people. In the Greek language there are many different words for love like, *agápe*, *éros*, *phília*, *philautia*, *storgē*, and *xenia*. There are at least six to choose from depending on what you want to communicate. So the English language was devoid of some precise words.

The words propitiation, atonement and redemption all deal with the greatest concept that theologically is so important to get accurate which is the concept of how can men and women who are sinful be right with God, forgiven and declared innocent. In a courtroom, they don't say 'innocent,' they say 'not guilty.' Why? It is because no one in that courtroom is ever innocent. We're all sinners and all guilty of something but in terms of that charge you are not guilty. We are not simply forgiven but we're justified which means to be declared innocent. How? It is because of what Christ did on the cross. What did Christ do on the cross? Our sins were imputed on Him and He became sin for us. His righteousness was imputed to us so my old record was taken on and paid for by Him and a new record, His perfect righteousness was given to me. So when God sees me I'm not just seen as forgiven but I'm acceptable because I'm innocent and have the righteousness of Christ that surrounds me, clothes me and presents me. Therefore I am acceptable in the beloved. Read Ephesians 1 to see all those wonderful things we have 'in Christ.'

What is the crucial thing that happens on the cross? Our sins are removed which then opens the door for Christ's righteousness to be given for us. How are our sins removed? Jesus did our redemption. Redemption means to buy back. A coupon used at the store is something you use to buy back the item on that coupon. So Jesus paid the ransom for God's satisfaction of

our holiness. That is God's wrath had to be against every one of our sins for every one of them had to be paid for. So Jesus takes our place, then takes our sins and then endures the unmixed wrath of God and provides an atonement, a ransom, a payment so that we could be redeemed, bought back.

When I was a kid my mother would get S&H green stamps that we would use to fill up the green stamp books with. Once they were filled we would take them to the S&H redemption center. We would then redeem the books by putting them on the counter and getting an item at the store to take home with us that was worth the amount we turned in. Jesus put Himself on the counter of God's justice and made our atonement, paid for our sins, ransomed us so that we were then bought from the shelf of sin, destruction and the wrath of God to be brought home to be with Jesus in a new heavens and a new earth.

Therefore it was declared that His atonement was a propitiation – a satisfactory payment. If you have a debt and I go pay that debt for you, then you are free from that debt. Jesus paid our debt and when He said 'It is finished' and the Father received His Spirit into glory, into paradise that was the declaration affirmed in the resurrection that our payment had been made satisfactorily to God's holiness therefore we are now redeemed because of the propitiatory (satisfactory) payment for our sins made by Jesus on the cross.

The word I am adding to these three is expiation and that means to take something away. In the Old Testament the lamb was to be taken outside of the city. The bull offering was to be taken outside of the city as well. The priests would put their hands on the scapegoat and confess the sins of the people as it would be taken outside the city as well. In other words, Jesus went to the cross outside of the city to take our sins away from us and the city of God. He took away our sins so that in the city of God, the family of God, the sins of God's people have not only been satisfactorily paid for with an atonement – propitiation – but have been taken away. That's why we like singing songs like *Gone, Gone, Gone, Gone* which says;

*Gone, gone, gone, gone
Yes my sins are gone,
Now my soul is free
And in my heart's a song;
Buried in the deepest sea
Yes, that's good enough for me—
I shall live eternally
Praise God!
My sins are G-O-N-E gone!*

In other words, Jesus has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. Our guilt and shame has been removed so now we can say because of propitiation through an atonement and expiation – there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Thank you for that question because I have just explained the Gospel to you. Jesus was the substitutionary death on our behalf where God made a way when there was no way except for our judgment.

Bruce: II Corinthians 5:21 says [21] *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* What a wonderful passage to meditate on. The next question is about praying during this present distress. The question is, can you help us think through how we pray during the corona virus crisis because we want God to end

the virus and remove it, yet we also want to pray in keeping with His will, but we don't know what His will exactly is so can you help us?

Harry: We do know His will in the sense of His revealed will – His Word. So always pray in accordance with His Word. So what do you know? If God is at work through something, we don't know all that He is doing in this or the final picture but we know it is all ultimately going to be for His glory and all things are going to work together for our good. There is your starting point. God, I am praying for Your glory in this and I don't know how You are doing it but I know there are people being saved that up until now have been resistant to the Gospel message. I know that people now have gotten more serious about gathered worship not that they haven't been able to do it. In other words, God is doing all kinds of things. His providence is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. Your job isn't to find out what each one of those things are. Your job is to pray that God will use the prayers of His people to accomplish His purposes. So you want to pray for the Great Commission. Now, when we stream our services we're not only heard in every state but I think we're heard on every continent now. So on every continent we are likely reaching people we had not reached before.

Praise the Lord for our 4300 members but our listening audience is way beyond that now. Now that will never substitute for gathered worship but right now in God's providence people are tuning into things at the invitation of family and friends to listen that they would have never done before. They would have been too busy, perhaps going to some game on Sunday. So pray for God to use these things in His wisdom and then to give us wisdom on how to use a moment like this.

Secondly, I think you pray for our leadership. Normally we pray once a month for our president, our governor and our elected officials plus the leadership at Briarwood and thank God we can do that and then any other special occasion. Now we are picking them up every week in our gathered worship and I'm praying that for other people. My wife and I this morning prayed for those who are over us and that God would give them wisdom and would protect them. We are praying for God to give wisdom to our elders. How do you guide the church through a difficult time like this present distress? So those are things you know God wants you to pray about because He has revealed that in His Word.

Then you surrender in something like this. God, I don't know what You're doing but I want to see You doing and then God give me wisdom to know when to give Gospel words to others but then help me open the door for the words with Gospel deeds. I want to thank our church community for the strong showing during our blood drive, our food collection, the giving of tithes and offerings but also the special gifts for the difficulties we are trying to address through our mercy ministry. So God give me the wisdom as to how to do that.

We're always praying for wisdom, the Great Commission, the Great Commandment and then for God to make us effective in building some bridges to people electronically that we likely would not have built physically before. Hopefully when this done, verbally, physically and socially we will be able to carry on those relationships in the future.

Bruce: Someone asked me recently 'do we keep asking God to end this even though He hasn't done it yet' and I said 'absolutely' for Jesus gave the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8. He gave the parable to teach us to always to pray and not lose heart. So we persist in those prayers.

Harry: One of my favorites on this is the second coming of Christ. Do I believe God has fixed a date? Absolutely. Do I believe it will be the perfect date for Jesus to come again? Absolutely. Yet something I pray almost every day is come quickly Lord Jesus, because that's my heart. God, I know You're going to end this virus so would You end it quickly? But in the meantime help me to be a part of everything You're doing as You're causing all things to work together for good and for Your glory.

Bruce: A parent sent us a question about their children. Their children are experiencing disappointment in a new way, at least not this way and they're finally realizing school activities, sport seasons, graduation, etc. are all being cancelled and they're not going to get them back. How do I lead them to trust God's sovereignty and His plan and what would be some particular focus of Scripture to study and share?

Harry: I will answer this as careful as I can. I know I can be misunderstood and thought of as unfeeling but I'm not. I have grandchildren that are going through this. I think that you empathize and sympathize with them – "I'm so sorry that this happened" and then secondly get creative with them – "Now that you can't do that, what can we do?"

I have grandchildren that love sports and I have loved how their parents have handled this. They have sympathized and empathized with them and then said 'but what we can do is be in shape like never before for next year.' What's a good regiment? God, has given us a chance to devote ourselves so that when we are in competition we'll be better than we ever would have and can use our gifts for the glory of God.

Secondly, you can bring these remedies and substitutions in their life with a Biblical framework, but now I'm going to get to the tough part. This is an opportunity to tell them that this won't be the last time this will happen to them. There will be all kinds of disappointments that they will face. Perhaps they will do a great job for a business that is going to fold and they will be out of a job at that point. Let them know that they will probably have this great dream but will probably see the death of that dream in their life at some point.

So with all the disappointments they are currently facing and will face, how will you look for satisfaction in your life? What do you look for in security in life? What do you look for in significance in life? Is life about you or about the Lord? So I will help as though you were my own grandchild, to see some things that God is doing and yes you have had to give up some things but I want to show you some things that are happening that make a difference for eternity. Can you join me in giving thanks to God that even though there is something that it has cost us in our wants and desires that actually God is doing something in the lives of people that we perhaps would have never seen if it had been business as usual?

This is our opportunity to find out that life isn't all about me. I am not the center of life. Now I can declare that God is the center of my life. The Lord has not been taken away from me. My salvation has not been taken away from me. The Spirit of God has not been taken away from me. The love of God through His people has not been taken away from me. Those things that really count cannot be taken away from me and I want to rejoice in the midst of the trial. Now you're free to teach your child the right use of this crisis.

God, what is it that You are affirming in my life that I know accurately? God, what are You showing me in my life that I don't know? God, what are You showing me that I need to know in my life? You can now take this and begin with sympathy and empathy help turn your child's world and life view. They were born with a self-absorbed world and life view, now you

can begin to turn it to a Biblical God-centered world and life view that *whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God* (II Corinthians 10:31). This can be a great moment for them.

Bruce: That is all the questions we have time for in this Q & A session. So you can certainly continue to ask questions regarding the present distress we are going through or even broaden your questions to ones you would simply like to know the answers to and send them to us at askthepastor@briarwood.ord.

Harry: I want to close this time by saying in another Q & A session I addressed how we are to pray but I'd like to ask, do you pray? It's interesting to note that before this present distress many were too busy to pray and in this moment it has opened up the opportunity for us to build prayer and the Word into our personal, marital and family life like never before. Yes, how to pray is important but I'm grateful for hearing about how so many are now praying way beyond any amount of prayer you have given before and that even greater fervency has come into your life concerning prayer.

When people have addictions that begin to eat away at their life for it may be food, alcohol, drugs, etc. one of the treatments is to take them out of their environment and put them in another environment where they can now get free from those addictions. Here's the problem. They eventually have to leave that secured environment and come back, so what kind of environment are they going to build?

God, has given all of us a residential program/opportunity where we don't have to pay any big money like people do when they go to these specific places of programs, where we can build into our life a physical regiment that properly disciplines/trains our body so we can buffet our body to be used for the glory of God, spiritual disciplines in our life like prayer and the Word like never before, family disciplines of doing things together but realize the old environment is going to come back. When it does, have you created some greater 'yesses' in your life so when that comes back you can say 'no'? I am not going to get too busy or overextended. I'm going to keep the foundations in life that I have had the opportunity to work on during this current pandemic – prayer, the Word, fellowship/communication in your family, activities together. Then we can restore that great activity of gathering with God's people.

Thank you for the privilege to be with you this day.