

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

Part Eight

May 10, 2020 • Sunday Evening

The questions we are answering now still to some degree have to do with our present distress but they are also moving to certain texts of Scripture and doctrines. Thank you for all your encouragement, comments and all the questions that have been sent. Please continue to send them. I'd like to start this session with the passage from II Timothy 3:16–17 which says *[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

Here is the promise that God has given us His Word through human authors, using their full humanity but sovereignly securing us a trustworthy, reliable, inerrant, and infallible Word that is sufficient to equip us for every step of godliness in life. In other words, God's Word doesn't tell you which branch of service to be in for the military but it does tell you how to view military service, how to be a Christian soldier, Christian businessman, Christian husband so it frames your life. That means you're going to encounter various challenges and decisions in life. Various principles impinge upon a moment, but when you get to a difficult moment I want you to remember something in light of the inerrancy of God's Word.

There are passages that are hard to understand. We certainly want to take advantage of commentaries, teachers, counsels and creeds, with all those wonderful instruments of our Lord's work in the church from these last 2,000 years, but remember your foundation – the Scripture, the fixed point, God cannot err. So whatever the challenging text or doctrine is it will never contradict the clear statements of Scripture. You learn to work your way through it from the fixed point of God's inerrant Word. That is the way I begin with every question that is sent to me – what does God's Word say that is clear, simple and fixed? Then you begin to unravel the difficult context or text that is being looked at. We do know it will never contradict what God has already said and that is called the principle of *ante logia de fida* which is by faith we have received the inerrant Word of God. Then by faith we apply that Word when we try to understand the Word. The only infallible interpreter of God's Word is God Himself through His Word. His Word is what we look to.

Let's keep that in mind as we develop a Christian world and life view through the sovereignly given, inerrant, infallible, sufficient Word of God for everything God has called us to do in life for Him.

Bruce: This happens to be Mother's Day so we want to wish all the mothers out there a happy Mother's Day. My dad gave me a great perspective on Mother's Day when I was a little boy and my birthday happen to be falling on Mother's Day that year so I needed a declaration on that day. I asked my dad 'If my birthday and Mother's Day are on the same day which one is it really, it is my birthday or is it Mother's Day?' I'll never forget his response, he said 'If it not for mother there would be no Bruce.' So about every seven years I have one less birthday and that's why I look so young, due to my birthday falling on Mother's Day.

Harry: I have a similar story. As I was growing up my dad was in minor league baseball and he would be away for extended periods of time. When he would get home I was in a rebellious

period of life for I was not yet converted and my secret life wasn't quite as secret when my dad was not there. My mother would discipline me and she was pretty tough but there were some things she would say to me that she would just tell my dad when he got home and let him handle it. After a number of those events I could tell my dad was pretty frustrated and this one time he sent me to get the instrument of discipline. He said to me 'Son, I'm going to discipline you again but this is the last time. If I come home again and we have this same problem and I meet your mother, this is your mother and you have done this to her, her life and her heart and I have to pick up these pieces again, I have a place reserved for you at the Stonewall Jackson reformatory school which I have already secured and that's where you will go. I've known your mother and loved her before I met you and I can get another you but I'm not going to let you take her from me.' That was an interesting dynamic for me to see how my dad valued my mother in my life.

I have since asked God, 'God, perhaps with better nuance, I want my children to know how much their mother should mean to them by the way I treat her.' This is a chance for us to honor our mothers and those who are mothers. Whether you are male or female you have a mother. This is your opportunity to honor and learn from her and then take it to the next generation.

Bruce: Our first question has to do with someone asking about the rose window, the circular stained glass window above the organ pipes in the sanctuary at Briarwood Presbyterian Church. The question is what is all the symbolism that can be explained about this window?

Harry: The rose window relies on the regal, majestic colors – dark blues, reds, purple, yellow highlights and the white for purity. Secondly, is the lamb in the window that is looking at the opening chapters of the book of Revelation – the seven churches and the things to come. Then there is the scroll that has seven seals. Under the lamb are the seven seals depicted that need to be broken to unroll the scroll to open the scroll of life so that we could have life evermore. Who is it that would be worthy to open the scroll? The One sitting on the seven seals is the One who is worthy to open it and that is the Lamb who is Jesus. The lamb is the metaphor used all through Scriptures to depict Jesus, from the sacrifices, the Passover Lamb and then the prophecy of the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. This is why John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Jesus, when he sees Jesus says 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)!'

There is also the pole, flag and cross in the window picture – so how will the Lamb secure the breaking of the seals? It is through this Lamb who is worthy for He is able to take our sins because He has no sin. So He is both the priest and the offering as He goes to the cross which is where He secures our redemption. Because of His triumphant atoning death the seals can be broken and through the work of God's grace the redemption of sinners, His glory and our joy is secured by that Christ.

The offshoots in the picture are just depictions that give this sense of outburst. In Titus 2 it says that the grace of God has appeared and as we look for Christ's coming He will appear again which is the epiphany – the outburst. So the window is shaped with a sense of rays as an outburst with the regal colors.

When one sees this you will notice that the cross is predominant at Briarwood because the Gospel is the Word of the cross, where the holiness of God meets the justice of God by the love of God to save us through the grace of God in Christ. If one happens to fly over this church

you will see that this church is in the shape of a cross as you look down on it. You sense it in the sanctuary with the two sides having the beam across yet it gives a sense of being able to gather together. There are also other windows with various colors of beauty but this rose window is the only one with a symbol and they purposely put it up instead of down so that it would not be seen as a symbol to focus on and worship but one of instruction as a declaration.

I have done some research on this but there may be some of our founding members who are still with us who may have some more insights on this and I certainly welcome their comments.

Bruce: This question has to do with the limitations, the rights of the church, the rights of the government, etc. It would seem the church gets its rights from government but not on its own, so if the church returns to worship will that be on account of the legality of its meeting in the eyes of public or because the church is right?

Harry: I want to give a few things for clarity first. We have been limited but we haven't quit meeting. I believe the church is essential and Lord's Day worship cannot cease. Can there be a case for the limitation? We already have that. We have overflow services and we have physical limitations so we have to stream it elsewhere but what we're currently going through is not a physical limitation but a medical and social limitation. I see our governing authorities who are responsible for the general welfare, whereas the church is not. The church can provide hospitals and health clinics but the church is not responsible for the general welfare, the state is so that's a valid role for the state. The state has made certain recommendations, directives and executive orders. Remember that an executive order is not directly a law but it is a directive by the executive branch of the government. Laws are passed. No one passed these but they were directed for exigencies or emergencies. I do not believe they have been targeted to limit the church. They have been targeted for the entire population. Therefore large gatherings of all kinds were effected and not just the church.

There have been some states and localities that I believe have stepped over the line of their authority into authoritarianism and have targeted the church. I have actually been in conversation with pastors in those states in terms of how they respond in a way that honors the Lord and they are responding well. In our context our President has given guidelines and he has told the governors to apply them. Our governor has applied them and on the contrary she and her office have affirmed the essential nature of the church.

Secondly, our rights are not given by the government nor can they be taken away by the government. We have two kinds of rights. We have the inalienable rights of life, liberty and property. Those are God-given rights that are affirmed in our founding documents of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. We also have enumerated rights and those are the Bill of Rights. These rights are working out the state's assurances of the inalienable rights so that life, liberty and property will be exhibited by the free practice of religion, by free assembly, etc., most assuredly in the first amendment itself.

So the government doesn't give those rights and the church doesn't give those rights. God gives the rights. Church, state and family are to conform to those rights. The state's job is to protect those rights in the context of law. The church's responsibility is to equip people for the God honoring use of God given rights in light of the power of the Gospel. The family is the instrument whereby society is nurtured and how you live your rights, not in anarchy, rebellion or

self-centeredness, but in a God-centered way as you raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Now we have been limited to ten people but we have continue to worship each Lord's Day with a full Biblical worship service. We are looking for the government in its prudence to open it up so then we will continue to listen to the government. We do not have a Center for Disease Control at Briarwood. We have common sense, Biblical direction and if at any time you sense that people are using a crisis to target the Gospel and Christianity, lives or livelihoods of believers, then it's time for us to appeal to the enumerated rights of the Constitution based upon inalienable rights. I do not believe we are in that situation and we should not act like that. Should we be on the alert? Always.

Our founding fathers were on the alert when they put together a government that was limited to secure and protect those rights. So that is the way we have tried to honor what we see. We are trying to love our neighbors well as we continue to love the Lord to the best of our ability in a present distress. We are not redoing the church so that gathered Lord's Day worship will never happen again. On the contrary, God has commanded and we must do. Now at any point if the government intentionally targets the Christian that they have to disobey God in order to obey the government that's a different story. We are not there.

We are in a present distress situation that I would compare it to a war. Churches on the coastline would discontinue Sunday evening worship services that they wouldn't light up a pathway for bombers to come in. They would put it back earlier in the day. That was loving your neighbor, being in submission to authority and was appropriate at that time. That is where we are now. I don't think we honor the Lord by saying something is happening that is not happening. There has been an overstep in other states and I have spoken to that but that is not the case where we are at this point.

I'm somewhat jealous to honor the Lord by honoring our attorney general, our lieutenant governor and our governor who I feel have tried to approach this with wisdom, getting advice and they have appealed to the church for our support. I'm very grateful for 99.8 percent of the church that says 'we're wanting to worship, but we understand and we're going to do the best we can in this present distress with the temporary remedies that have been put in place.'

Bruce: Praise the Lord that our governor this past Friday issued a new order with allows us in large gatherings to gather together in worship and there is not a cap except that we would apply strict social distancing.

Harry: That is exciting. It makes me think of how I felt when I watch the movie Chronicles of Narnia and the ice begins to melt as green begins to show through, yet we're not where we want to be by any means but this is a step in the right direction. It also affirms the bona fides – the goodwill in our government in this matter. They mentioned they would take a closer look at it over a week ago and they have so now we have these directives. This leads us to our Briarwood interim worship/ministry plan C. We have done A and have currently been under B and now we'll go to C in this coming week. Notice that we're still in an interim ministry plan but we can at least move forward in concert with the new guidelines that our governor has communicated to us.

Bruce: This is the way plan C will work on May 17, 2020. We will have three morning worship services and we'll assign Sunday school classes to each service. We'll give more information

later this week but the objective is to maintain strict social distancing so that you can go from the parking lot to the pew without touching anything. There will be two pews marked off between pews that will assure safe distance.

Harry: We are actually only required to have one empty pew between pews but we're going to begin with a two pew separation so that every third pew will be available to sit in at Briarwood for everyone's safety and protection.

Bruce: We'll reevaluate as necessary but there will also be hand sanitizer for people to use and we encourage people to wear masks. If you don't have one then one will be provided for you. It's really contingent upon the people. One appeal we want you to know is that when you do come go straight to a pew and when you get done go straight to your car, because we'll be doing three services back to back and we'll need to disinfect between services and flip the parking lot. We are really looking forward to getting back to gathered Lord's Day worship.

Harry: We are also looking at here in the future of how we'll do congregational communities (Sunday school classes), small group Bible studies here at church and in homes, etc. but we want to get this right to begin with in terms of reinstituting gathered worship beyond the ten, meeting the guidelines so we can do this in a positive way as we anticipate the full gathering of God's people again in the future. I hope you feel the same joy in your heart that I feel that we are making this progress in this present distress. We don't want to be haphazard or thoughtless as we do this. We want to love our neighbors and visitors well.

Bruce: Also at this time when we gather this coming week there will not be a nursery. There has been some strong restraint on that and I think the word of caution there is wise. We will have during the second and third services the Children's Worship time which will be laid out later this week on how we'll go about doing that observing the strict social distancing.

Harry: These will be one hour worship services and we have been practicing this in our plan B phase so that it doesn't seem abrupt during that time. I believe the Lord is blessing this and we're trying to honor the Lord. Part of honoring the Lord is to love one another well, affirm the Spirit as well as the letter of the guidelines that are being given to us but again to enjoy the blessing of corporate worship in this measured way. Our Sunday school/congregational communities and small group Bible studies will continue their zoom meetings and we'll continue the Q&A for our Sunday evenings until further notice.

Bruce: So here is a related question. How do we relate to those people who aren't taking that positions, in other words, specifically they feel that we should be required to obey the government, what does it mean to our Christian witness to a watching world when we post, respond and take stances against the government?

Harry: I think if people are thoughtlessly taking stances against the government that are unwarranted then it's just a bad witness. You need to go exhort your brother. I think if people lay out a warning we need to be aware of these things and I don't see that as a bad witness. In some states there have been people and churches who have brought lawsuits and I think that's appropriate because in those cases either a mayor or a governor has overstepped or targeted

churches. I do not think Peter and John presented a bad witness when the government told them they couldn't go preach in His Name and when they let them out of jail they went to the streets to preach in His Name. When the government came back to them and said 'didn't we forbid you to do this?' they responded 'yes you did but we must obey God rather than man.

If I had received a directive that said we could not have any kind of worship service on the Lord's Day then people may have been visiting me in jail, but that is not what has been said to us. We have to act rightly in our own context but in a situation where it's an overstep I don't believe it's a bad testimony if there has been a clear directive that would cause people to disobey and has targeted the church. I don't think you should start a rebellion or hoarding up guns but you go to the Constitution. Thankfully right now we have an attorney general in the administration that once in Chicago, twice in Mississippi, once in New York, California and Virginia has made it abundantly clear that he supports the church and that those were oversteps and the state governments had to back up. When you do it that way, you are securing precedence for future generations as well.

This is why the Apostle Paul on three different occasions when he was set free that wasn't enough for him and he went back and got the government to apologize. He was thinking about the church at Caesarea Philippi after he left. I think Paul is securing the future in those three incidents by appealing to law, not with a rebellion or a revolt. I think that's the way we're to handle it. I'm grateful for the Alliance of Defending Freedom and Liberty Counsel for they always with a measured approach bring some clarity to these issues and have had a wonderful track record in court.

Bruce: This question is from Luke 10:19 which says *[19] Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.* And Mark 16:18 which says *[18] they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.* The question is, does this relate to us today or was it an event that was being referred to? Also the follow up question to this, is how do you balance those passages with Proverbs 27:12 which says *[12] The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.?*

Harry: Before I answer this I want to include the text surrounding the Luke 10 passage and that is Luke 10:17–20 which says *[17] The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" [18] And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. [19] Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. [20] Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

This text deserves a lot more treatment than I have time to give it right now but here are a couple of thoughts on this. First is that this is a second event and the first event is back in Luke 9 where Jesus sends the 12 out with extraordinary apostolic gifts of healing and in this event Jesus sends out the 72 along with the 12 which were a part of the 72. He had one mission only to the Jews and He will have another mission that will go beyond the Jewish nation to other cities as well. In this context He is prefiguring for us and giving us a taste of the Great Commission and work after His redeeming death, when He defeats Satan at the cross and His ascension. And then He will send us out two by two into all the world to do the work of the Great Commission of

evangelism and discipleship. This is a foreshadowing of it but it's also related to affirming who He is as the Messiah.

So He tells them to go out being fully dependent on the provisions that He will supernaturally give them. They come back with joy. Now notice when they say 'even the demons are subject to us.' We are told in God's sovereign plan that the nations are under the authority of the evil one and that is broken at the redeeming work of Christ. Satan is no longer the prince over the world. He has been cast down. He has not been destroyed but he has been defeated. He has now been chained by the work of grace for he can only do so much and then God's sovereign work of extending the Great Commission throughout all the world so the Gospel is now going to go unhindered, not simply in the covenanted nation of Israel but to all the nations. Satan is being bound or restricted from stopping the work of the Gospel. He has not been stopped from railing against it or tempting to thwart it but the power of the Kingdom now stands supreme over the kingdom of darkness. That is what they saw when they went out and the demons would flee.

The demons didn't flee because they came in with a plan of exorcism, sprinkling water on them and uttering ritualistic prayers for this isn't exorcism by ritual. This is Satan and the demonic world having to flee when you bring the light and the power of the Gospel. People have asked me what I do when I go into a demon possession and I pray, preach, read God's Word and sing God's Word and I know whenever you bring Light darkness has to flee. That is what they experienced here.

Jesus then says 'let Me tell you what is really happening – not just the demon world but the prince of the demon world, Satan – for I saw him falling **like lightning** from heaven.' Notice the suddenness of Satan's fall. We have had thousands of years of the rule of sin throughout the nations of the world as you see it expressed in the first expression of the kingdom of the anti-Christ at the tower of Babel and it continues to go from nation to nation.

God sets up a man, Abraham. He gives him a family. He promises a Seed. He gives a nation and through that nation is going to come a Seed that is going to go to all the nations. Now we see in the ministry of Christ the throttling back of Satan and Jesus gives this to them. What is really happening through the Incarnate work of Christ going to the cross and in His ascension, Satan is now defeated but not destroyed and sin has been overcome.

Then Jesus says you shall tread on serpents and scorpions – what is He looking at there? I want to take you back here. When Satan came to do his work in the garden he came like a serpent. When the discipline of God came because of the sin of Israel in the wilderness they were inflicted with biting serpents and scorpions. What was God's antidote to that? It was a cross with a serpent nailed to it which was looking toward Christ who would go to the cross, take our sins and defeat the evil one. Satan is pictured in the Old Testament as a serpent. The work of his demons is the work of serpents and scorpions.

In fact, it goes on to make clear this is a spiritual implication because it says that 'the spirits are now subject to you.' Jesus is telling them that when you take this Gospel forward anywhere throughout the world the kingdom of darkness will have to recede, demons will have to flee. Light overcomes darkness and the Kingdom of God has now come in power. It is coming to Israel first and then to the world which is why Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, says to preach the Gospel to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles (Romans 1:16). God has opened the way and bound the strongman, although he is still resistant and greater than us, for the Gospel to go to all the nations. One little word shall fell him and we preach the Word of that Christ throughout all the world. When that Light is shed darkness has to flee.

Now would there be a special blessing of the apostolic? We see the Apostle Paul surviving the bite of a serpent in Acts 28 so yes but this is not calling us to open up a church and get a box of snakes. This is telling us when you gather together be equipped in the Lord and when you scatter take the Gospel everywhere you go and the evil one, his demons and false prophets have to flee when you bring the truth of the light of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So the next part of the question was it for then or for now and it is for then and now. We do this all the time. I go into homes that have been broken up with the works of the evil one, perhaps it's not demon possession but demonic influence is there – the devil, the world and the flesh – and I just bring the Word of God. I don't have a ritual or a ritualistic chant to go through. I don't put my trust in me holding some water as I sprinkle it on something. I bring the truth of the washing of the water of the Word. I bring the power of the Spirit. Any and all of us can do that who know Jesus. That's why in this particular case it's not just the 12 but the rest of the disciples that were following Jesus and Jesus is showing us the embryonic picture of what the church is going to do in taking the Gospel into the world and the receding effect upon the kingdom of darkness.

Bruce: What are great focus to end our time for this session. Please continue to send your questions to askthepastor@briarwood.org and again Happy Mother's Day to all the mothers reading this.