

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Eleven

May 31, 2020 • Sunday Evening

I would like to begin this time with a devotional thought from my favorite chapter in the Bible which is Romans 8. The first section of this chapter speaks on the definitive text of the ministry of the Holy Spirit that has been sent forth from our risen Savior to us. I love the rest of that chapter because it speaks of the sufficiency of the Christ that the Holy Spirit brings us to that is the Lord of glory, our Savior and King, Jesus. One of the things I love, particularly when you think of dealing with crisis, challenges, and adversity is that God has given us an emotion known as fear. Fear is a blessed emotion because it brings to us carefulness and concern, but when we are disconnected from a vital, personal, accurate relationship with the God of glory then our fears begin to dominate us and instead of bringing carefulness they bring paralysis which is why man-made fear is cast out by the perfect love of Christ. We can put away anxiety but can have a concern even as the Apostle Paul did when he had concerns for the churches.

So how do we get rid of that debilitating, paralyzing fear of man or man-made fear? You do so by developing an accurate view of God so that you have an awe (fear) of the Lord, who is your Savior. He loves you – God the Father, God the Son (your Savior) and God the Holy Spirit who is with you and will be with you to bring you to glory. This is why I love Romans 8. Romans 8:31 says [31] *What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who can be against us?*** There is a lot that is against us but the key is in comparison to God. If you see the majesty of this God, who loves you and gave His Son to save you then we can bid our fears and sorrows to cease and desist because the love of Christ now compels us. So let’s now get to the questions that have been brought to us.

Bruce: I’d like to comment on your statement about fear first. Years ago there was an event that happened in my life that was somewhat tragic and after that I really experienced a spirit of fear. I was driving in my car by myself and all of a sudden I experienced this overwhelming fear that I knew was a spirit of fear. I had a very wise pastor who had the answer to that in my life and that was to focus on God and God being always being in control. Then just as we often sing, that fear disappeared. I had tried hard to make the fear go away and I couldn’t but when I focused upon God it did and what you were saying just resonated with me.

Harry: There are some contemporary Christian songs we still sing that I love and one of them that I feel still has some legs on it is the Isaiah 43 one where it tells us;

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you*

*And the waves, will not overcome you*

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you*

*I have called you by name, you are Mine*

*Chorus*

***For I am the Lord your God***

***I am the Lord your God***

***(I am) the Holy One of Israel, your Savior (2x)***

***I am the Lord***

***Do not fear***

*When you pass through the fire, you'll not be hurt*

*And the flames will not consume you  
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you  
I have called you by name, you are Mine*

I am with you, which is where the emphasis belongs for God is greater than our fears and therefore we do not fall back into the spirit of fear which brings bondage and slavery to us.

When I was a kid I kind of started out my childhood fearful of things. I noticed that I would get over something once I got to know about it. I would look at, research it, study it and with certain things I had to work my way up to doing it, like that five story roller coaster when I was 7 years old. The same thing happened as I learned to ride a bike without training wheels, I had to work my way up to it.

It's the same thing with life where Satan will use all kinds of things to intimidate you but get to know, not simply what you're afraid of, but get to know God who is greater than all your fears.

Bruce: We have broadened our questions to not just the present distress but to anything and in this time we have a sampling from various sermons you have been currently speaking. Today we celebrated Pentecost Sunday and so today we received a question that says, what actually is Pentecost Sunday and why do we celebrate it?

Harry: The very word Pentecost tells you it has to do with 50 something (pente). Pentecost is 50 days after the Passover and the last Passover was fulfilled in Christ and His resurrection. So 40 days after His resurrection He was doing His post resurrection ministry and we celebrated that the previous Sunday which was the celebration of Ascension Sunday. Then Christ told them to go spend time in prayer and the Holy Spirit would be sent to come upon them. Then in direct relationship to the Feast of Pentecost, Feast of Booths and all that was related to declaring the indwelling presence of God, for it was in the context of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit fell upon them. So we celebrate that event of 50 days later of which the Holy Spirit was sent from the Christ 10 days earlier who had ascended into heaven and now the same Spirit that was with Him from the womb through the tomb back to the throne of God from the throne is now sent to be with us from our new birth to when we will be brought to glory. The Holy Spirit is the promise from the Father as the outpouring of the Spirit is identified from Acts 2.

Sometimes I don't use the term 'the Holy Spirit' because I like to use it in a personal way. I like to pray not for the Holy Spirit but Holy Spirit come to us, be with us and be among us. Christ now dwells in us by faith through the work of His Spirit – the Spirit of Christ – the Holy Spirit who is given to us. Just as the Holy Spirit propelled Christ from His baptism forward into ministry, the Holy Spirit propels us forward as we are baptized with the Holy Spirit into the Christian life. That is what we celebrate – that we can have the gifts of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, we can walk in the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, all of those wonderful dynamics of the Christian life because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, not simply in the holy of holies but in you where you have become the holy of holies and He dwells in you a the believer.

One other simple piece of this is that Christ not only dwells in you be the presence of the Holy Spirit but the Holy Spirit has brought you from death unto life to bring you to be with Him. Finally, Pentecost is the reversal of Babel. When God comes down in judgment upon humanity as He confuses their languages due to their rebellion against Him in a consecrated place called Babel (the tower) and dispatches everyone into their ethnicities by their languages, Pentecost then declares the drawing from all of those nations together as His people and we will be by one

spirit, one faith, one Lord and one baptism, unified. The consummation of that is at the marriage feast of the Lamb when we get to the new heavens and the new earth. Until then, there is one catholic, one universal church that is being drawn from all the nations into a royal nation, the Kingdom of God because of that glorious reversal because of the curse of sin. So instead of disconnected because of our sinfulness, we can now be unified in the Lord.

Bruce: So you referenced the one church and the global nature of it going to all nations, even in Jerusalem they are there celebrating Pentecost, so the city acknowledges in Acts that there are people who come to Jerusalem from all over to celebrate this where 3000 souls are saved so we know others are there who speak other languages, so what happens then practically? There is the beginning of the New Testament church so how does the church grow in Christ especially for those who left after Pentecost who didn't have a church to go back to? Walk us through what took place there.

Harry: I think they were there long enough to get the sense that the New Testament church was going to be developed in the context of the Old Testament provision of the synagogue which was a remedy to the dispersal of God's people. Now the people of God are dispersed to the nations but are being called together. The first step of being called together is a local church and then comes a presbytery which are churches in a region where they can unite together. Then there is the confession of *the* church universal that we believe there is the one holy catholic (universal) church. We get the sense of it in the first New Testament church which is there in Jerusalem, then wherever the Gospel goes, the Apostles bring the Gospel message and the next thing they do is plant a church.

As the Apostles fulfill the Great Commission by going out from Jerusalem then we know that in some places they are going to meet those who have probably started meeting together in some form or fashion. Remember those were Jews that were converted so they know the concept of the synagogue. This is speculation but there is some evidence that what they have probably done is that they were starting to congregate as a Christian synagogue and then the Apostles begin to plant the New Testament church. Paul gives a book of church order with I Timothy, II Timothy and Titus as to how the church is to be ordered and function to fulfill the Great Commission and live the Great Commandment. We get to follow that in the book of Acts as the church expands from Jerusalem north and west to Judea and Samaria. Then it goes to the world that ends up in the evangelization of Europe within 30 years of the Ascension of Jesus.

I recently spent time with a man who belongs to our church who is a Christian and is from India. He is highly cognizant of the ministry of Thomas, the Apostle who goes to India. The Apostles go in different directions. We follow the Apostle untimely born, Paul and Peter which takes us on the north and west trajectory. We know they will find these Christians who have left their conversion at Pentecost and they will be brought in. This is indicated in the first missionary journey in the reception Paul received in places like Lystra, Iconium and Derbe. We were told Timothy was being raised by a believing grandmother and mother. How were they believing? Either they were at Pentecost or something came and share this with them. Paul encounters that when he gets there and then eventually comes Timothy's conversion as well.

Bruce: We have a question about gathered worship. What verses have Christians over the years used to determine the standard for gathering for worship? You have mentioned Hebrews 10 and since some have gathered we have not neglected to gather here at Briarwood. Are there other

Scriptures that speak to the practice of gathering for worship? We heard a pastor say they had gathered worship, would virtual services have been sufficient in that case? What Bible verses would make that man feel like he must hold service even though he may feel in danger?

Harry: I want to respond two ways to this. I'm not really sure what's being said but I haven't suggested that we have maintained gathered worship. I have declared that we have maintained gathered worship. Yes, for the sake of welfare and for the sake of obeying the command to be submissive to the civil magistrate, who in giving directions, were not targeting the church but were giving general directions, we limited the number. Just like every Sunday we limit the number with our facilities and therefore we plant other churches for all believers don't have to be here. So in this case it was socially limited because of medical reasons. I do believe we did continue gathered worship which I believe is important because of the Hebrews text. I don't really need other texts.

For instance, the Bible uses the word *Theopneustos* – meaning God breathed – to describe the Scripture. That word is only used one time in the Bible but there is nothing more important hardly in the Christian faith than the fact that the Bible has one author and that Author using human authors in the Holy Spirit, who has been sent as the breath of God to carry the Apostles along to give us the Word of God.

The word predestination is found nine times in the Bible, now the concept is found many times described in the acts of God. The same thing is true about inspiration and the same thing is true about the synagogue. Hebrews 10:25 says *[25] 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.* I only need this one and it's not if it's repeated six times than it is really important. Yes redundancy and repetition does give greater importance but you don't need repetition in order for something to be important. The fact that it is in the Word of God is sufficient for me to know how important it is.

I do believe it is reinforced in the Bible first of all by the three names of the church in the New Testament – *chirche*, *ecclesia*, *sunagoge*. *Ecclesia* means the called out ones, the called together. The *sunagoge* means the gathered together ones. Those very words for the church are a descriptive of a gathering for God's people. To be saved you have to make a personal commitment to Christ but when you were saved and baptized you were added to the gathered together ones (the *ecclesia*, *sunagoge*). There are metaphors for the church – an army, a family, etc. – these are put together in groups as armies are in battalions, and families are in a household. So the very terms are those of gathering together.

Then there is the giving of the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments deal with worship and it's given to us in the plural. Not only should I not personally make a graven image but we as a church are not to make graven images. I just recently went through the book of Exodus where the people had gathered together in idolatry with the golden calf and the answer to that was when Moses declared 'who is on the Lord's side?' They were to gather together and in this case only the tribe of Levi responded. We are an assembled people and we gather together in the Lord.

There is so much more I could say on this but I'll just end this way. We see the work of the Gospel go out and people personally are led to Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What do they do in Acts 2? Acts 2:42 says *[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* They continued together in all this. In other words, they came to hear the Word of God in concert

together. It doesn't mean you don't do personal Bible reading but it does mean they came together as God's people and there is our pattern set for us in a New Testament church as they would not forsake the assembling of themselves together.

The book of Hebrews is simply reinforcing what the Apostles led the people to do, which is to assemble together. In worship we are to speak to one another. We are to make a common confession of truth. Those are statements of a gathered assembling of God's people.

The last part of the question was are there times to gather for safety? Yes. Right now there is the persecuted church and they meet underground. The church at Rome was meeting at the catacombs. I'm not saying you can't bring prudence to the assembling of God's people and is there are bomb threat? We have dealt with that here at Briarwood. We did all kinds of things to deal with that. We put together an entire team that worked on it. We took every precaution in that matter. So yes you can take precaution. If someone told me 'if you show up at Lord's Day tomorrow I'll kill you' there is no doubt as to what I'd do. I'd be here but I'd tell those I would need to who would take every precaution to protect me and all those who came. I am going to take precautions in those matters but I'm not going to forsake the assembling of God's people.

Even right now during this pandemic those in vulnerable categories we tell them to be careful and act with precaution and we'll try to help as we can, certainly as a virtual remedy for them. The worst that Satan can do is bring the threats against your life. His greatest instrument is death but our greatest instrument is dying. We have died to ourselves and we live unto Christ and it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us. Does that mean I look to die or act stupidly? No.

I'll never forget when I went to preach in Uganda and I walked through the cemetery and saw all these Scottish names there in the middles of Africa. I said to my host 'Who are these Scottish people?' He said 'That was when we got evangelized and the English Anglicans paid for the Scottish Presbyterian missionaries and they came here, but our stories abound for when they arrived they did so with this unusual luggage which we found out later was their coffin.' They knew they were going to die. They knew about the fevers and they didn't have vaccines. They knew when they got there they would have somewhere between two weeks and two to three months. That's what was on the tombstone – arrived and died – but they willingly gave their life to get the Gospel to them and not we see great east African revivals taking place. The epicenter is Uganda.

Bruce: The next question goes back to your sermon on Daniel. How come in the book of Daniel, Daniel is known by his original name while his three companions – Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) – are known by their Babylonians names?

Harry: My simple answer is that in the Holy Spirit's sovereign work Daniel wrote the book so Daniel chose his name and never changed it except to let you know it changed. There is a little bit of intrigue here and I've done a lot of study in the book of Daniel. In the copies of the book of Daniel that we have, the indication is Daniel 1 and chapter 8 through the end are written in Hebrew. Daniel 2 through 7 are in what we call today Aramaic. In other words, in the language of the day. It's almost as if Daniel 2 through 7 give incidents, activities, things that took place in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar through the demise of the Babylonian empire, the institution of the Medo-Persian empire and all those things you could have probably gone to the library there in Babylon to see. They are almost like accounts of things that happened. I think that is the way

the Holy Spirit led Daniel to give us that. Therefore how would Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) be referred to – not by their Hebrew names but by their Babylonian names. That’s why I believe the account comes to us that way.

Our language today was cut and pasted. In other words, these are real historical accounts that Daniel includes for us as the accounts are given. When Daniel is writing in Daniel 1 where he steps out and Daniel 8 through the rest of the book where he becomes front and center he is just simply referring to his name. Those names that were given to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, their Babylonian names, all relate to different Babylonian gods and all are misspelled when you get to the name of that god. Even the name given for Daniel, Belteshazzar, is misspelled. I think that was the Babylonian’s way to get their point across that ultimately they would be defined by their gods and not by their God. You feel free to refer to them as their Jewish names because I’m sure they would prefer that but those are my thoughts on that.

Bruce: The last question comes with an observation during the current crisis we are going through. What things do you think we’ll keep doing due to this current situation and what things do we hope and pray we’ll never have to consider after this is over? I have been thinking about this personally and one of the observations for me and my wife has been, you can slow the pace down at home and be okay but we’re beginning to feel the blessing of that slowed down pace. Things at church haven’t necessarily slowed down but at home it seems that pace is so much slower. What is one of the things you have identified as a keeper personally during this time?

Harry: People have been telling me they want to get back to the normal and for me I don’t. There are things in the old normal I want to reclaim and make sure are in place. I love the rhythm of the Lord’s Day – the gathering of the 8am, 10:55am and 6pm worship times. I long to get back to that. Also the unhindering of assembling for outreach events and celebrations. I also work better by leaving the house to get certain aspects of my work done so I’ll be glad when we can fully open our church facilities again. I enjoy the face to face meetings. I’m grateful for the zoom meeting but it’s not the same as being face to face where you can read the person’s tone and body language and everything as you’re trying to help, shepherd and counsel people. So there are things I want to get back to in the rhythm of a Christian life but there is some of my new normal I’d like to get in. My wife and I have been able to do our exercise together whereas before we were doing it separately. It’s amazing the things we’re able to talk about, pray about while we’re out and I’m hoping we can maintain that to some degree. There have been some things that have been taken out of my life that I don’t think need to be put back in.

I would suggest that your children don’t need to be in 3, 4, or 5 organizations at one time or several different sports leagues at one time. I don’t think you need to get back where the mother’s role is being a taxi cab driver to the different events. I think there are things you can do as families, perhaps things you’re doing now that you ought to want to keep doing then.

Our question and answer time seems to reflect that there are people who are now doing Bible readings that may be weren’t doing Bible readings before individually and as a family. I hope you won’t say ‘I’m going to keep this’ but then pile everything else back on top of it. I have found that when I’m reading a book I need margins and when I’m living my life I need margins. So my wife and I have created a practice to make a budget, live within our budget, we have our tithe and an offering and then we try to keep a margin so that we can respond to financial emergencies.

We have done the same thing with our calendar. Try to keep margins in your life so you can respond to the emergencies of life. When something happens many will say ‘oh I’d love to do this but I just can’t find the time.’ Leave some time. There is the Lord’s Day so set it aside as holy for renewal, refreshment, family, worship, rest and then for the rest of the days don’t try to jam it full. The point is not necessarily efficiency – how much you can get done – but it’s effectiveness – what are the right things to do.

So how do you say ‘no’ to things? Here is what I’ve found out. The best way to say ‘no’ is to have a bigger ‘yes.’ Someone might say ‘pastor I want to meet with you at 6 o’clock’ and I might respond by saying ‘I’ve got a bigger appointment to meet with God so how about 6:30?’ or another time. Make the bigger appointments. Nothing is going to stop me from the Lord’s Day worship. I have an opportunity to spend time alone with God or my family. We have time to do a family walk or a family devotion. Keep those things and don’t just try to maintain them. One man said ‘When you have a jar you can always put the sand in and always put the water in but the rocks have to go in first.’ So what are the big rocks in your life – your relationship with the Lord, with your spouse, with your children and the time necessary so make sure you not only have the right things in your calendar but not too many things in your calendar. Get some margins in life.

Bruce: I agree. One of the things my wife and I have noticed in whatever we do, is those conversations we would have had before, for whatever reason, almost unexplainable, we felt we had to jam it into a ten minute conversation and now that can be a 60 minute conversation, not only with more depth but a whole lot more clarity. That’s all we have time for in this session. Please continue to send your questions to [askthepastor@briarwood.org](mailto:askthepastor@briarwood.org).