

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Thirteen

June 14, 2020 • Sunday Evening

The devotional thought to guide us into our discussion today will be from a very familiar text of Scripture but I'd like to make a specific point from these two passages. These are the passages that affirm the authority and integrity of God's Word. II Timothy 3:16–17 says *[16] All (meaning every) 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.*

God breathed means that the Holy Spirit through chosen vehicles—Apostles and Prophets—and the Holy Spirit carried them along so the Author of all the books of the Bible is the Holy Spirit through 40 plus human authors, therefore is profitable for teaching even the genealogies listed in the Bible and everything else in the Bible. Then that reproves us because we're sinners so that corrects us because we want to walk in obedience to the Lord and then that trains us with a world and life view to instruct our hearts as to a lifestyle. That lifestyle is described as being equipped for every good work.

So not only is the Word of God inspired, inerrant, and infallible but it is also sufficient. God's Word is our final rule of faith—what we believe—and what we practice which is a result of what we believe. In fact, if you want to know what someone believes watch how they live for our behavior will betray our true confessional position, not the one we repeat but the one we live by. And God's Word is sufficient to equip us for *every* good work that the Lord has called us to do. That is what we try to appeal to in the preaching of God's Word and why it's so important to the exaltation of Christ and the right use of the Scriptures. We try to appeal to God's Word in the Today in Perspective podcast and as we attempt to field your questions which will be various in this time today.

Bruce: I have received numerous responses from people who were very encouraged in what you did in our last Q & A as we walked through some of these various issues of racism, divisions, riots, etc. and putting those in Biblical perspective. Many of those people really all come to the same realization of these issues being complicated and challenging where it's taken us years to develop wrong perspectives on these things and to build ourselves into bad practices and responses. So the common question that comes from this is, what do I do personally? They are looking for how to think through the bigger macro issues but they're not placed in spot to really fix those things so they know they have to be intentional and sensitives to those issues, but in terms with their daily walk with the Lord and their relationships with other people, what pastoral counseling would you give for what we need to be doing personally in times like this?

Harry: My counsel is do something personally. We all seem to want a big stroke event that would kind of just change everything and make it right but that didn't happen in our sanctification. Now there are some things we were converted that God just took out of our life but most of the time part of our sanctification is the process. The bringing to bear of Christianity as salt and light to an entire culture is a process—to get a Biblical world view with consistent life practices and public policy—seldom does that happen overnight. We have to get engaged.

I recently sent a tweet by William Carey on June the 12th when he wrote in his chronicles and it was an unbelievable day which was jam packed. He never came home when he was in

India for 41 years. He said ‘God has given me the gift and the calling to be a plotter, do the next right thing.’ Go meet the next person.

I want to bring out a couple of things here. The church in the midst of this has to get their marching orders from Jesus, not the culture. The culture is surfacing the issues that need to be addressed yet Jesus gives us the message, the ministry, the means and the mission to address them. The church has to keep its eye on the ball of what God has called us to do and that is the Great Commission, to evangelize and disciple people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As the Gospel is taught, the whole counsel of God, we teach them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us and that would then lead us to public policy and to the public square as a Christian.

For instance, are you going to protest? Certainly Christians have and should protest but how will we protest and what will we not participate in. What are our aims in a protest? How do we respond to things? How do we see a civil magistrate, i.e. a police officer? What about the Bible’s call to honor and respect them yet realize we can get bad police officers just like we can get bad preachers. What do we do with bad preachers? We discipline them in the church. What should the government do with bad police officers? The state should discipline them and make sure that unions don’t over protect. All of that needs to be done.

Those are public policies and you get those when you learn to vote right, learn to promote certain policies, etc. but you do this by personally engaging in the Word of God and the church staying on its mission and message to equip you. The church’s mission is very focused so that we produce Christians who have a broad mission of whether they eat or drink or whatsoever they do, they do all to the glory of God so they are the salt of the earth (not the church, the Christian). They are not just a light in the church but they are a light to the world and they can’t do that unless we do what we’re called to do which is equip them with the whole counsel of God and be ready to guide them in how to deal with moments like this.

I know people want to say or do the one thing or make the tweet that will change everything but that’s just not going to happen. As my wife and I had some time away this past week, we prayed ‘God, would You please, knowing how hurt and despairing many of our African American friends are, give us opportunity to engage with those we don’t even know yet to make a friend.’ God, did that miraculously for us with three different African American couples while we were gone and we were able to talk as we built a relationship with them. I think that’s the way it happens—person to person, relationship to relationship.

As your church equips you how do you see that person? Do you see them through the social construct of another race? We have to recognize two things. We are in this problem because of the way the world looks at race as reinforced by Darwinianism. There is a Caucasian race, an African race, an Asia race, etc. and as long as you look at this way then it becomes, which one is best, particularly when evolution says ‘survival of the fittest.’ So you’re stuck in this and there is no answer. It’s just which race will be considered supreme then but we say ‘no’ to that. God made every person in the image of God and therefore God from Adam made a human race. That human race is in sin and that’s where racism comes from—from a heart bent to sin—then you learn how to work that sin out with the actual sin of racism, partiality or discrimination which is all rooted in the mother of all sin, pride.

In the book of James he gets to the heart of the issue here, which is the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart and only the Gospel can ultimately change it, although good public policy could restrain it. One of the things we need to do is create a way we see our neighbors which includes people we haven’t met yet for all are made in the image of God. The

half-brother of Jesus says in James 2:8–9, *[8] If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. [9] But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.* I John 4:19–21 says *[19] We love because he first loved us. [20] If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. [21] And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

So you have a person in front of you, made in the image of God, and because of the amount of DNA that changes their skin color, you think that somehow you can discriminate against them and say that you love God? It’s impossible for you have a heart problem to do that. So we need to keep correcting that and teaching people how to engage in it. What does Jesus do? We now have a second Adam in Jesus and His people are coming from all of the ethnos, so we have one race with multiple nations/ethnicities and their cultures. So what do we do in the church? We take the Gospel to all the nations and when you come to Christ we are in identity no longer primarily identified by that nation for we are now Christians and we have a relationship.

Right now, do you know what China hates about Christianity? They hate that it’s international. They know when Chinese people come to Christ they automatically have brothers and sisters in America. They don’t want that and that’s what they understand. Galatians 3:26–28 says *[26] for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. [27] For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. [28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* We realize we are coming out of those ethnicities but we’re coming to something greater and more glorious. So the church needs to mentor, model and then the people of God need to personally engage through relationships.

I know this is a long answer but it’s one that is on my heart. I’m just trying to do the next right thing with people step by step and then as a pastor trying to equip my people with a world and life view that is consistent with Christians and that responds to the consequences of the wrong world and life view that would allow and promote something as horrendous as what the Bible condemns which is chattel slavery which is man stealing.

Bruce: Earlier this week, I received a text that had many of the statements that one would see in the media today that are all loaded statements that people tend to interpret very differently, but this person and I wouldn’t come from the same starting point in terms of our understanding and belief about the Word of God and Christ, etc. They were just wanting me to respond to all these things but I said ‘after much prayer and deliberation, let’s talk.’ We started as we spoke for about an hour on the phone and agreed that this would be a long and continuing conversation. There is so much to figure out when it comes to what we are and are not saying because both of us by default impose perspectives on the other person so we have to work our way through that. So that making it a relationship is so key and to be persistent.

Harry: ‘Love your neighbor’ is a broad statement and everyone made in the image of God qualifies as my neighbor but don’t feel the pressure that you have to have the input with the guy in Sacramento. You have to have the right view of them and have to know how to respond when you meet him. Start with the guy next. Start with the men and women around you. Start with the people where you work, in your class, on your team. Don’t just think I have great view and bumper sticker statements for everyone. Just start with people one on one with Gospel words

and Gospel deeds. So that you do justice, love mercy and you walk humbly with your God. The church has to equip you to do that.

Bruce: Someone recently told me that you, Pastor Reeder talk a lot about having a Biblical world and life view, a filter with which to look through when things like this happen and basically theirs was not well-developed and I said well that's what he does for a living for that's his calling but then they asked a great question. They asked, 'What do I do to develop that kind of filter and to grow that kind of Biblical filter to deal with this?'

Harry: This probably sounds so self-serving but the most important decision you will make is your consistency in preparation and choice of what preaching you listen to because as I Corinthians 1:21 says, [21] *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.* So it is through the foolishness of preaching that we are being saved, not only from the power and penalty of sin but from the practice and perspectives of sin. That is number one. If you're haphazard on the hearing of preaching you will at best have a haphazard Christian life. When all is said and done the pupil becomes like their teacher (Luke 6:40).

Jesus told us to be careful to what/who you listen to and how you listen. Mark 4:24 [24] And he (Jesus) said to them, "**Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.**" Jesus says in Luke 8:18 [18] **Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.**

Secondly, you need to get into the Word of God. Psalm 1:1–6 says [1] *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked (Get in the counsel of the Godly), nor stands in the way of sinners (flee temptation), nor sits in the seat of scoffers (don't let the grumbler, complainer, gossiper, slanderer, whisperer take you down into the basement- assemble with people who will lift you up in the balcony of grace); [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates (personal time in the Word to reflect) day and night.*

[3] *He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. [4] The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

[5] *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; [6] for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

This was the reason Paul said to the Bereans that they were more noble-minded because they examined the Scriptures personally and then were desirous of hearing. They heard the Word preached with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily—that rhythm in your life is really important. Then get Godly people around you. Then get some Godly disciplers and mentors in your life in a small group, those whom you admire what God is doing in their life. Get their life on your life and your life into the lives of others. Then you really take off when you know you have a responsibility in their life. Get on mission for Christ for when you do ministry and engage it that is constantly challenging you to think better, live better and to live in a way to affect others. Get involved in ministry to use your spiritual gift. That's the way you being to develop and then be patient.

In a sense, don't be satisfied. I'm not satisfied where I am but I praise God that I'm not where I was. You need to start with the next steps. Get on the journey in growing in the grace

and knowledge of Christ through the means of grace publically—in worship, teaching—and privately in the Word and then in small group discipleship, encouraging, with modelling and mentoring but be patient along the journey.

Bruce: When you have to know something to the degree that you have to explain it and answer the question to someone that helps you learn it so much more. There is a question we have about Sunday worship. We are currently in the summer months, vacation season as some would put it so their question is, is it okay to go on vacation, and miss and be gone on Sundays?

Harry: I have an elder I greatly admire who was part of the formation of the Reformed Theological Seminary, Robert Canada and my uncle Lonnie, an elder, who grew up in a Calvary Church which was the same church as the Graham's (Billy Graham's family). My grandfather had the same perspective and then one of my spiritual fathers, Herald Jones, I also admire. Except for vacations, if Herald had to be away on a Sunday he made it a point to be back by Sunday night and someone from his family was going to be worship.

Vacations are fine. God built a vacation with a purpose into every week and it's called the Christian Sabbath. It is resting—vacating from your normal work—in order to, with a purpose to be refreshed physically and spiritually in the context of worship with the people of God. For the Old Covenant people God built every seventh year a Sabbath year so they would get a year's vacation. We have talked about how some professionals get a sabbatical. With my current congregation I don't take a sabbatical like some pastors do every year but I do take a three week sabbatical for study, rest, renewal and preparation for what is coming. Then you have the year of jubilee which a sabbatical year added to the sabbatical year every 50th year. When they got to the 49th year they had seven sabbatical years they had practiced and then added another one to it. God built in the need for rest—six one, six one etc. So having a vacation time is fine for there is nothing wrong with that.

But I don't think you take vacation away from worship, from Christ's church. I encourage people to find a place to worship when they are out of town on vacation. Call us and we can give you the names of some solid churches in the area you are in to consider to worship at. Don't vacate the Lord's Day. Don't vacate worship. Have your family there in worship. That is about as big of thing for us in our family where every year we do a family vacation in September for four days and it's always over a Lord's Day so that church we attend seems to look forward to seeing us on that weekend because our family tends to increase it about 25 percent when we're there, because it is a smaller PCA church that we are grateful for. So it is encouraging to them.

God has given Briarwood a legacy ministry and you go to another church while on vacation while you tell them you are from Briarwood, you have no idea how that blesses those churches for I get letters from pastors who tell me how encouraging it was for members of our church to visit theirs while out of town. So those are my thoughts on this question.

Bruce: This next one is a loaded question. Please help me understand modern idolatry and how to be a sports fan in the state of Alabama without crossing a line to worship.

Harry: I played sports my whole life. My family got its living from sports—my dad, my granddad, my wife's father who played the big leagues. I never got to the big leagues but I love

sports and how to use sports. Sports are a great clinic for life, you just can't let them become your life. So let's start with idolatry.

What is idolatry? It is forbidden in Scripture. The law of God in Exodus 20:3–4 says [3] *“You shall have no other gods before me. [4] “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. This means don't out of your imagination create objects of worship. Anything that is before, above or beside the Lord for your affections or allegiances for the resources God has given you—time, treasure, talents—is idolatry. If you have that in your life you need to kill it because it will kill you.*

Sports is a great clinic for life but it's not life and it's a terrible god. It's not going to save you from your sins or build your family up or give you a relationship with your spouse, children or others. Can you use it in your relationship? Absolutely, as you serve the Lord. I would love for us to present a testimony for we have people that can handle food, drink, and sports with whatsoever they do they can do to the glory of God because they don't get their glory from it and they don't glorify it. Do they appreciate them and respect them? Yes, but our adoration and affections have no competition from those things and you have to make a decision to do that. I know people who cannot tell me the books of the Bible but can tell me who was drafted out the last college or NFL football draft.

One time I overheard two ladies arguing about who received the best signees for Auburn and Alabama football and as I walked up they were really mad at each other. We were just about ready to step into worship at the church and they are going at each other. They looked at me and one said 'War Eagle!' as the other said 'Roll Tide!' and I said 'He is risen!' Thankfully they laughed. We have to get a grip on this for your personal growth in Christ so I am appreciative of the question.

For me, there was an element of my life in sports that I gave up for five years because of another addiction in life I had in relation to it, but by in large, you don't have to give up sports in your life or the appreciation of it or even the viewing of it. It's not a god and it doesn't dictate your life. It doesn't get between you and Lord's Day worship. If sports govern your Lord's Day worship you have a problem. That's idolatry. Let's face it. We do what we want to do and what we are saying is, that is more important than Jesus even when you say as long as it doesn't conflict I'll let Jesus have the Lord's Day. Just be honest with it. Does sports take precedence in your life over the Lord's Day? Just say, “Jesus, I love You and I know You said ‘do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together’ but this entertainment, this engagement is more important than the Lord's Day’ and now you are in the arena of idolatry. It is controlling you because it controls your schedule, your affections and ultimately your resources therefore your allegiance has now been declared. I think that is something you have to grapple with, not because I think sports are evil for they are not. It's just like anything else, even God's great blessings in life like food, drink, work etc. you can have it out of place and if it is before, above or alongside the Lord it's out of place and will ultimately become destructive in your life.

Bruce: Now we have a new controversy in the church as we gather together for worship and that is wearing masks or not wearing masks during this pandemic time. The question is, I see those working the doors at the church, the church staff and others wearing masks but what is that saying to those who aren't wearing masks?

Harry: I have spoken to this issue with three different pastoral letters to our congregation and is available online and the last letter in particular I said that we were going to go by the guidelines set by the state. Now our guidelines from our state director do not mandate masks so we're not going to mandate masks. I'm not smarter than they are, but we are going to provide them and we are going to encourage you to and nobody is going to look down on you. If you don't want to wear them then that is between you and the Lord. Someone may sit a little farther from you out of their concern but you have to put up with that if that is your decision. So that is our position and there is no spirituality or shame with this. We don't do mask shaming or non-mask shaming here.

Why do our staff wear it? It is for you. It is to give you as much of a comfort level as possible. They are not wearing it to say they are more spiritual than you because they have a mask. They even wear gloves so we are doing that because you need guidance when you come into the church. You can choose to come in and not get close to anybody but when you come in you need some direction and we have put people there, therefore for you. We have asked those covering a station at the church to wear a mask and gloves so that people feel free to come in and sit. We also have people who say 'I can't believe you're not making everyone wear a mask' but we're just going to go by the guidelines and the our staff is taking a position to go the extra mile for you, in terms of what they wouldn't have to do personally but because you have to walk by them they are doing it for you.

Bruce: You make a great point because so much of what we're doing is simply passing along what the experts are giving to us. We don't claim to be doctors or even focus experts in these fields but we're trying to pass along what they have said are the good guidelines and protocols, while still trusting the Lord.

Harry: I have listened to the CDC (Center for Disease Control) say mask are necessary and then say they aren't. I have heard the WHO (World Health Organization) say the same thing. I have heard all kinds of things where they say one thing then back track and now if you're asymptomatic maybe you can't give it to them. I say that because of all these people who couldn't wait to get in front of a television to make a pronouncement and we're all listening because we're not microbiologists. I'm not an infectious disease expert so we're listening and we want to trust you. So when we get all these mixed messages that causes us problems. I believe in doing research and everything I can so that before I speak I've got some sense of what I'm saying so it's not just 'I just read this on the internet' type of response or 'I just want to get in front of a camera to say something.' So I think they have undermined themselves in many ways. Having said that, I feel our state health director has been very measured, very thoughtful and hasn't had to go back and change anything due to overstating something. So I believe we are in a good place with our medical director and our governor, I think, is getting information to say the right things in the right way at the right time. Again, I'm appreciative that unlike other states our governor has declared as far as she is concerned the church is essential and she wants us to reopen like everybody else. We have had the privilege to carve out some things for other churches.

Bruce: That's all we have time for in this Q & A but I want to encourage you to continue to send your questions to askthepastor@briarwood.org and we'll look forward to answering them.