

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Fifteen

June 28, 2020 • Sunday Evening

This is a substitution for our Sunday evening service until we will be able to appropriately gather on Sunday night, whereby we answer questions that you send to us and we answer them based on how to have a Biblical world and life view. I like to begin with a short devotional. Today’s devotional comes from John 15.

John 15:1–18 says [1] *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. [2] He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. [3] You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. [4] Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

[5] “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. [6] If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. [7] If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. [8] This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Here Jesus presents an allegory of the Gospel message and Gospel blessing that we are in Christ and Christ is in us. Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches. As we abide in Christ we bear fruit and He holds onto us as He abides in us. The Vine and the branches are organically connected together and inseparable if there is a true saving relationship between us and Jesus Christ.

I want you to see two things. One if you don’t bear fruit then you’re cast away and burned. That is anticipating the lake of fire. Is that saying if I don’t bear enough fruit I lose my salvation? No, it’s telling you that there is no such thing as a fruitless Christian. In other words, if someone is in Christ and Christ is in them they will bear fruit. If there is no fruit, then there is no root.

Secondly, He says that those who don’t abide in Him are cast away. That’s how you bear fruit. You are in Christ, Christ is in you and as you intentionally rely upon Him, not with passivity but with activity—being in the Word, praying, in the Spirit of God, in the context of worship, etc.—where you are constantly in a living, abiding relationship with Christ and when Christ is abiding in you then your life begins to manifest that to others. That is the fruit that we bear.

The passage brings out that there are some who say they are believers where they look like they are in the arbor where the Vine, fruit and branches are, but in reality they are not in Christ and are just weeds growing in the midst of it. The reality of knowing that they are not in Christ is that they don’t abide Him and are cast away plus because they don’t abide in Him they don’t bear fruit and are cast away.

Those who are in Christ and abide in Him, not only are they saved but they bear fruit and then God in His grace does something that many times we don’t think is His grace and that is He prunes us. He gives two steps of pruning. Pruning number one is so that we will bear more fruit. In other words, we’re bearing fruit by virtue of our salvation—we have a changed life—but He wants us to bear more fruit so He prunes us. Then it says He continues to prune us so that we bear much fruit.

It's kind of like where Paul calls young believers 'babes in Christ' and the mature 'fathers and mothers in Christ.' Or when Paul says 'those who have the flesh still hanging on them' versus those who are spiritually mature. More precisely Jesus spoke of these Himself when He spoke of the parable of the sower. He spoke in terms of the root being in Him and those will bear more fruit and much fruit as in 30 fold, 60 fold and 100 fold.

The last thing from this devotional is the way Jesus defines fruit in John 15:8 which says *[8] This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.* Fruit bearing is the work of the Spirit of God by the Word of God as you are abiding in Christ, Christ is in you with changed lives that are growing—30, 60, 100—fruit, more fruit and much fruit. One, the fruit is a lifestyle that glorifies God and two it's a lifestyle that proclaims you are in Christ and Christ is in you. You are a follower of Christ and your life begins to take on that dimension. It's exciting to see this life in Christ!

Bruce: We have a variety of questions for this time and if we haven't answered your question yet please be patient with us for we will get to it. The question we are starting with has to do with Satan's tactic of intimidation. The question is it seems we're seeing a lot these days with pastors and other Christian leaders being intimidated by Satan, for example Chris Hodges from Church of the Highlands for liking a Charlie Perk tweet and suddenly he is labeled as a racist and forced to respond. It seems the apologies are unnecessary for they have done nothing wrong so when things like this happen how should Christian leaders respond?

Harry: First of all, the question is not only up to speed on current events but they have listened to a couple of things. Three of Satan's strategies are intimidation (because that paralyzes/silences people), infiltration of the church with false leaders and teachers, plus the members with grumbling, complaining, slander and gossip and then thirdly is imitation that has to do with the tares and the wheat. Then there is specifically intimidation of Christian leaders.

Satan does want to silence, detour, distract, discourage and demoralize Christian leaders. I was actually away on vacation with the situation with Pastor Hodges hit so I immediately began to pray for him that the Lord would surround him with people that would encourage him, would give him wisdom as to how to respond to it and I was also able to contact him to let him know that because I've been in places where I've had to work through such moments.

Having said that, to answer the question, a Christian leader needs to lead as they would expect a Christian to do in a moment like this. In your life in Christ you speak truth in love and if someone brings a charge against you in something you have said or done, either they are right or they are wrong. They may be right or wrong in two categories. Perhaps they are saying you didn't speak the truth so you have to see if what you said was true or they could be saying that you might have said something true but you didn't say it in love so you look to see if you did it in a loving way. I think Bishop J. C. Ryle said this—truth without love is barbarity, love without truth is cruelty. I like to put it this way: speak with Biblical clarity, that's truth and Spirit-filled charity, that's love.

So if I said something that wasn't right I need to apologize or if I said something right but not in the right way I need to apologize. It wasn't that you meant to offend but it was that you did it offensively, then you need to apologize. Now if you didn't then you don't apologize but that doesn't mean you deal with the person brusquely or obnoxiously or arrogantly. If you said the truth and you said it in love you don't just get up and get on with it but try to find out what the problem is actually and that would be done. In other words, you need to find out if you truly

sinned by what you said or the way you said it or the inaccuracy of what you said. If you didn't do any of that you still take the moment to build a relationship with the person that is offended and find out really what was offensive and get to the root of it. So you don't make a false patronizing confession if there's nothing to confess about what you said and how you said it.

Secondly, find out what God is trying to teach you in the midst of this trial because God is not wasting this moment so even though it's a difficult moment don't waste it. Thirdly, see how you can use this in the life of the person who has come to you in a profitable way in their life as well. Let me say what you don't do. Don't say 'If what I said offended you...' If what you said offended then you need to say 'What I said offended you, please forgive me.' Don't put it back on the other person. If it wasn't truly an offense or truly inaccurate then don't confess for it's a false confession. You can say 'I'm sorry you were offended and I'd love to talk with you about it. I think what I said was true and I did my best to say it lovingly but I want to find out what really was the offense and can we talk about that.'

Bruce: I've experienced something similar where I've thought 'Am I wrong or have I been misinterpreted?' but either way it is good to hear what you said about not saying 'if it offended you...' because if you feel the need to say 'if' there then clearly you have offended someone, now deal with the offense. Let me flip it the other way. Let's say you offended me and you acknowledge that knowing that you have to confess and repent that back to me, well what do I do as the person who was offended?

Harry: Bruce, I think you forgive. That's what you do. The Bible tells us to keep short lists and we do not keep bringing a matter up. Now if you won't forgive me then I want to find out why. If do forgive then you don't bring the matter back up again as if it hadn't been dealt with. I'm not saying that you all of a sudden get amnesia but you don't hold them to it any longer for you've forgiven them and so it is set aside.

It's like how I believe God deals with us. He removes our sins from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12) but if I have had an anger response to someone, asked them to forgive me, they do, then ask God to forgive and He does, it doesn't mean that God isn't aware. If one of my indwelling sins is anger God is not going to forget that because He loves me too much so we're aware of our situation but we don't hold that issue against the person for it's done with.

Bruce: That is part of the pruning God does that you were talking about in the devotional time at the beginning of this time. The next question is given that Jews are God's chosen people do they worship the same God as Christians do—my God sent His Son to die for my sins to give me eternal life, but their God did not?

Harry: In the formality of Judaism my answer is 'no, they do not worship the same god we worship for the last 2000 years formally.' Up until then 'yes' for this is the God of glory who is revealing Himself progressively in the Old Testament to bring everything to Christ the Redeemer, to manifest the preeminence of Christ as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Once Christ is rejected there is an official dynamic on this for the Jewish religion through the leaders before Pilate on that very day, was an official vote by Judaism of no. That doesn't mean this includes all the individuals for there were many Jewish people who had a saving, personal relationship with Christ, but the formality of that religion on that day said 'no' to the Triune God,

'no' to Jesus being the Messiah and now the suffering messiah is the Jewish people themselves which is the interpretation of Scripture.

So the answer is post Christ the formality of Judaism is not the same god but up to then it is the God of glory who is progressively revealing Himself to Christ who came to His own but His own did not receive Him. Once you say 'no' to Jesus there's never neutrality. You don't just stay where you were. If you say 'yes' to Jesus there's a growth dynamic upward, uneven, but there's a growth. That is true of individuals, churches and pure religion. If you say 'no' to Jesus individually or churches abandon His Word or a movement, religion or denomination does, it won't stay static but it begins to descend. The god that is preached formally in Judaism is not the God of the Bible.

Bruce: What part do legal financial consequences have on the policies of our session at Briarwood in regards to possibly finding ourselves out of accord with our government at some future point in time?

Harry: I want to take on the first part of the question. The church like every Christian is under the mandate to be submissive to the governing authorities for there is no authority not appointed by God (Romans 13:1). But that has one limitation which is if the authorities who have been delegated authorities by God, use their delegated authority to make commandments that would cause us to transgress the authority of the law of our God, then we need to be like Peter and John who had been instructed by Jesus to preach the Gospel yet the authorities in Jerusalem said when they were releasing them that they couldn't preach in His name any more but they went out and preached in His name. When they were arrested they said 'we must obey God rather than man.' So as long as civil authorities are doing their delegated authorities for the general welfare of the people delegated by God, then we're not only going to submit but we'll be the example for that is part of loving our neighbor and loving God.

If those authorities usurp their authority to take God's place to give us commandments that we would have to transgress the law of God by omission or commission, then we would have to say 'no, we have to obey the commandments of our God.' We won't do it with a rebellious spirit but we will do it in faithfulness to Christ and be willing to take the consequences even as many of the martyrs have that have gone before us.

Now specifically to the latter part of the question regarding if the government would pass laws that are anti-Christian or would cause us financial penalties, then our session would obey God rather than man with no wavering exception. I have no doubt about that whatsoever and I'm grateful to serve with them. I have watched them petition state and federal government. I have watched them deal with the sanctity of life. I have watched them pass the sanctity of marriage and sanctity of sexuality statements that govern our church no matter what threats—title 7, title 9—it does not matter. For every one of our ministries, I have seen them faithful and I'm grateful to serve under them and learn from them.

Bruce: I get asked about some of these same issues and people want to know if it was hard for our session to deal with. I kind of grimace and say 'no' due to the fact we see clearly what God's Word says but what we were careful to do as we invested lots of prayer and time in, was to create the document, plan or process of response.

Harry: Our session takes a lot of time to be truthful and loving, pastoral and precise but whether they were going to do it or not to be faithful to what God's Word says about the issue at hand, there was no hesitation at all. I thank the Lord for that and for my predecessor, Dr. Barker, who set that example, the founding elders of this church and the current elders who carry that forward and do so without arrogance or self-righteousness yet with humility and courage.

Bruce: May we never take that for granted and may we always pray for our brothers who perhaps don't have that situation built into their church.

Harry: I just received two letters this week asking me for the very statements that I'm talking about and we gladly shared them.

Bruce: This next question is about the president. President Trump was criticized for threatening to provide armed forces to quell anarchists protesting the George Floyd murder. Is it not his right and duty to do so?

Harry: I will be speaking to this objectively as much as I can for this is not a partisan statement. It doesn't matter who the president is for what I'm about to say is constitutional. Protests are protected so the president on the one hand will protect the right for lawful protests. In fact, I could make the case that our constitution actually encourages lawful protests, because one of the ways you manifest a government of the people, by the people and for the people is not only at the ballot box at elections but also by freedom of assembly and addressing or redressing of grievances. That is one of the ways a country matures when it is a republic like we are, under law. The law constantly has to make sure we are on target with what the constitution has said as well as our statutes we pass in relation to the constitution.

So on the one hand the president is to use the right means proportionately to protect protests and on the other hand he is to use means proportionately in order to stop anarchy. Anarchy must not reign. Whether it's anarchy, monarchy or oligarchy you cannot have that. To do that just go back to our constitution for when we came into existence there were two nations that had their independence at almost the same time—one was France and one was America. France went the route of anarchy and immediately was followed by tranny and a dictator. America went the route of rule by law so we not only won our independence with the Declaration of Independence but we also ordered our independence instead of anarchy. We ordered it with the law called the Constitution. Then we provided its maturity and maintenance with the Bill of Rights. So the President is to protect the constitutional right of protests and yet he is to lead us in the removal of anarchy.

There is a process here for we, America, are a federal republic therefore the first line is the local mayor, then the governor of the state and they have access to what you might call the national army which is the National Guard—the militia. If it is not acted upon, for instance the situation in Little Rock, Arkansas, where Eisenhower (President at the time) brought out the National Guard because the governor would not bring out, to protect the civil rights of the African Americans who were going to go to school that day, then we're also aware of the situation in Alabama. So a president must protect protests and call for lawful protests. A president must prevent anarchy in the name of protest so that is how I would answer that question.

Bruce: The next time we meet we will get the opportunity to celebrate our imperfect but blessed establishment of America for we have our Christianity in America which will replace our Q&A time. So I have a personal question about that for often times there is a dichotomy for me. Even when I first heard you say Christianity in America, I actually heard you say Christianity and America and that was my dichotomy. I am a child of God and my citizenship is not only not in America but it's not on this earth for it's in heaven yet I'm proud to be an American so I go back and forth on this and it feels contradictory many times. So how do I as a Christian process the appropriate Biblical celebration of what God has done in America without going too far with that?

Harry: Pay close attention to the prepositions in Christianity. I think it could be said Christianity of America but I didn't use that phrase because Christianity is not 'of' America, for Christianity is transcendent on America. Jesus is not the tribal God of America. Jesus is King of Kings, Lord of Lords and we are to make disciples of all the nations yet it is not inappropriate to have a Biblical patriotism, not a worldly nationalism. That is what got Germany, Italy and Japan into trouble—false religion and one of the false religions is national-ism, being a nationalist. I am a Christian and I am identified with Christ, but I believe in Christianity that you not only have a heart for Christ and to see the Gospel go to all the nations, you have a peculiar heart for your nation.

Paul had this same view of his country when he says in Romans 9:3, *[3] For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.* Paul, a Jewish man called to Christ, commissioned to take the Gospel to all the Gentiles, kings and those who are in authority of the Gentile, yet in his heart he acknowledged that he had to go to the Jew first. He was deeply moved to win his own people, even willing to say something that I have not been able to arrive at saying which is, Paul was willing to be anathematized for the sake of his people.

Then there is Calvin and Geneva. What did Calvin do? Calvin not only disciplined, shepherded and was the catalyst for the expansiveness of the Reformation and reclaiming the Apostolic Gospel in Christianity that had been shrouded in corruption, immorality, superstition and false doctrine in the Roman church of that age, but he created at the peril of his own life 1300 missionaries and pastors for France and the burgeoning Huguenot church at that time.

Then John Knox, after he leaves Geneva, goes back to his country of Scotland where he is a wanted man, notably by a couple of queens, and stands on the shore and says 'Give me Scotland or I die.' Knox wanted the Gospel to go to all the people of the world, in fact he pastored an international church in Strasbourg, Geneva but he had a heart for his own people. Then there is Latimer and Ridley who are being burned at a stake in Oxford who say 'Be of good courage for today we shall light a candle for Christ that shall not be put out in all of England.' They knew the English Reformation would bless other nations but they had a heart for their own.

So I believe Christianity to the world but I also believe in celebrating and consecrating Christianity in America. That is what we do with this service—we celebrate what Jesus has done and consecrate ourselves to be instruments for what Jesus yet will do. That is the purpose of Christianity at work in America. How has it been at work—let's celebrate and praise the Lord. Are there imperfections, sins to be repented of, and ministry to be done? Yes, but don't get me wrong here. I'm not saying for the church to go be the state or the family but the church is to be the church that will bless families and will bless this state called America so the Gospel will go all throughout.

That is the way we use flags here at Briarwood. We don't use flags to declare nationalism, we use flags to declare where we want Christ to go and we are unabashedly praising God for a true, Biblical patriots love for our nation and the work of the Gospel in our nation, giving thanks to God for what He has done and anticipating what He will yet do. It's a service of celebration, confession and consecration.

Bruce: So will you end our time by giving those reading this a little taste of what is coming in our Christianity in America time.

Harry: The ability to do this kind of gathering was challenged and threatened with our guidelines so we prayed through it. I want to thank the Lord for the pastoral staff and elder leadership team that gave oversight into solving this with the best solution we could come up with. We did not want to abandon it this year due to the COVID situation and then hope we'd pick it up next year yet we realized there were a lot of things working against us trying to do a socially distanced service. One, is likely because of the attendance we would look to possibly have we would not be able to socially distance with one Sunday evening Christianity in America service, yet we didn't want to abandon it. We want to honor our veterans, God's work of providence, have a time of consecration of what the Lord will yet do and to use it for outreach so our worship team, communications committee and staff together to figure out a way to do this service. I'm so excited about this and it will take place on Sunday July 5, 2020 which is Independence weekend (July 4th) in place of our Q&A time. Tune in. I will do a Gospel presentation around the theme of Christianity in America and we will be interviewing some of our veterans so that you can hear what God did in their life as well as honoring those who have given portions of their lives and remember those who gave their life so that we could enjoy the blessings of God's providence in this nation. We will also ask God to let us not waste such absolutely extravagant gifts of people sacrificing to protect, not governments to protect them, but their God-given unalienable rights.

As you think of the sacrifices that in God's providence people have made for us to enjoy this marvelous things called the American Experiment, I would ask that you think of something greater. John 15:13 says *[13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.* But you serve a Savior who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords who laid His life down for His enemies that He would save them. When we were helpless and ungodly, He laid down His life that we might have everlasting life in Him. We are now not only His friends but we're in His family.

When this country began there was a statement of being—under God—very clearly by the content of the Declaration of Independence and that is now included in our pledge of allegiance as a nation. I will never forget reading in my civics class in the 9th grade when my teacher explained why and how a parliamentarian stood up after the Declaration of Independence was read on the floor at the parliament in London. There was a quietness when this document was read that had been sent from America and a quietness in the London parliament is unusual. The quietness lasted until a parliamentarian named Horace Walpole stood up and said 'That's it, cousin America has just run off with a Presbyterian parson.' I would love to hear that again that I would even settle for a Baptist parson or any kind of faithful evangelical pastor but he was talking about an individual named John Witherspoon. Witherspoon had only been in America nine year but thirteen of the men that were in the Congress, he had personally educated and

discipled. One of those men who sat under Witherspoon basically was the author of our Constitution whose name was James Madison.

There are so many things of God's providence in our Declaration of Independence, in the war of independence, in the Constitution whereby our independence is governed by law and then our Bill of Rights whereby our law is matured, maintained and now grown throughout all the years that we need to hear and know. I believe it all is because of the providence of God. Would you join me in not only celebrating what God has done, but consecrating ourselves to God what He would yet do through us and that the church would turn out believers who are salt and light and that we as believers being used as salt and light will rend the heavens to come down to grant us another awakening, very much like the one that gave birth to this nation from 1735 to 1765? Let's ask God to do that again.

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