

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Seventeen

July 19, 2020 • Sunday Evening

This is our substitutionary study in place of our regular Sunday evening studies. We continue to pray to the Lord to continue to do what He desires to do and to remove this COVID-19 virus would be our request yet His purposes to be accomplished. I'd like to start by giving a devotional thought before we get into answering the questions that have been submitted.

In the book of Romans 8 there is one word that is used three times and I have chosen it very pointedly. As I talk with people about our 'present distress' and how we need to respond righteously, Godly and sensibly, thankfully without fear, with prudence without panic, trusting God without tempting God, I sense an audible groan and I couldn't help but think there is an evidence that God's Word is true. Because in God's Word we're told He made this glorious creation, crowned it with man, male and female, and it was all good. In other words, there was no groaning. Then comes sin and now we have groaning. Because of sin we have broken bodies, broken parts, broken dreams, broken schedules, broken relationships etc. That is what sin does, it breaks things. Romans 8 acknowledges that because it uses the word groaning three times.

Romans 8:22–27 says [22] *For we know that the whole creation has been **groaning** together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, **groan** inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. [24] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? [25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

*[26] Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with **groanings** too deep for words. [27] And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

First, it says our body is groaning with in us and the older you get the more you will identify with that statement, I can assure you. Our body is groaning because of the curse of sin in this world as the 'outer tent' is decaying, even while the Lord is renewing the inner man. Secondly, the creation is groaning. We have seen evidences of that with hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, famines, wars etc. with these catastrophic destructions that are here in a broken world because of the curse of sin, but we've even seen it in viruses, pestilences and that's why the Bible tells us that we're going to have these things. There may be people who promise you a utopia but they will be unable to deliver that for we live in a dystopia. We live in a groaning body and a groaning creation.

The third groaning in Romans 8 done by the Holy Spirit who is interceding for us with words that are too deep to be uttered. When we pray to the Father we pray through the Son who intercedes and in the Spirit so there is kind of like two safety nets in our prayer life. The Holy Spirit intercedes as the prayers are brought to the Father through the Son who also ever lives to intercede for us. Yet here in Romans 8 we're told there is a humanly incomprehensibly reality to the intercession of the Holy Spirit. He is saying to the redeemed who are in a broken world and broken body that what the Spirit is interceding for us we can't even put into words. Have you ever said to someone 'My words fail me'?

The other day I was in a situation where I was evaluating something on my program 'Today in Perspective' and I made that comment, 'My words fail me.' Last week in our Lord's

Day prayer I made the comment ‘Lord, it’s not surprising to You that unsurprisingly we don’t have the words to properly convey the reality, the depth, the height and the breadth of your grace and love.’ It’s that concept that is being communicated in Romans 8 where what the Holy Spirit is saying as He is interceding for us, we can’t even comprehend it in human language. It is so glorious and so majestic and that is characterized as the groaning of the Holy Spirit to the Father, through the Son on our behalf.

So that is just a thought for you today as we are in a groaning world having to make adjustments all the time but don’t weary in well doing. Even though we have groanings in our body and in creation, we have the groanings of the Holy Spirit on our behalf so stay the course for the Lord and take heart. So Bruce, let’s get to the questions for this edition of Sunday evening podcasts.

Bruce: Now that it’s Biblical to groan I’m just taking all that in and doing it myself. That is a great perspective and it’s so helpful. There have been a number of times I’ve been praying about something and have just literally run out of words as I’m praying. I’m not even sure what to ask or even what to acknowledge that’s in the midst of what we’re doing. Praise the Lord that He knows that and provides His Son in the Spirit for us. I always default to ‘Ok God what do You want me to do independent of You’ yet I hear things like ‘No Bruce, this is what I’ve empowered you to do.

As we get started with our question and answer time I did want you to comment on this. This past week our governor came out with another press conference which reemphasized the safer at home and the importance of wearing a mask in public. What are your thoughts or comments on this?

Harry: As soon as I give my two thoughts I’d like for you, Bruce to weigh in since you are a part of the leadership of us being appropriately compliant and appropriately alert in all this. As I read through all this for us nothing changes. In fact, it reinforces what we are doing and for that we’re grateful. Now it has heightened the expectations of wearing masks in public. It sounded as if our governor is moving the expectations and need to wear masks for the next couple of weeks to the same level as what we had already been doing, because of the Jefferson county orders. So in a sense it wasn’t new for us because our governor is now promoting in the public arena the wearing of masks which pretty well lines up with what the Jefferson county medical director had previously said. Also, I appreciate the way our governor did this when she said ‘having said that there are constitutionally protected freedoms that we carve out and we ask you to act with wisdom.’ We understand in worship that there is confessing, praying, singing and other things but we’re still calling for social distancing, strongly encouraging masks, etc. The governor is really saying ‘we’re going to trust you to use that freedom but use it wisely for the health and well-being of one another and your neighbors.’ That is what we have attempted to do.

I tend to think you always know you’re somewhere near what you need to be when you have one group of people telling you ‘you’re not doing enough’ and another group telling you ‘you’re doing too much.’ Having said that, that is very minimal. I almost get emotional that there is this overall recognition and support that we’re prayerfully doing what we ought to do, in a way we ought to do it and trying to honor the Lord in support of this congregation each and every week and I’m overwhelmed by it. I’m grateful for the privilege to lead people who will certainly make their insights known but who also respect the decisions of the leadership. Once leadership has made a decision that is thought out, prayed over and not in violation of any

Biblical command in primacy of worship, there is the response of the civil magistrate appropriately. As people encourage that it's really been a blessing. We are already within a responsible use of our affirmed constitutional freedoms and I feel I can safely say the way we have it safely set up, if you get COVID-19 at a worship service at Briarwood, then you had to go out of your way to do or unless you just consciously decide you're not going to follow the social distancing, sanitizers and face masks. I feel very safe and comfortable at Briarwood by the way we adhere to the guidelines set for people to avoid getting the virus.

Bruce: You are exactly right and basically the conclusion was because of the Jefferson county order, we're already doing this. However, we don't say 'we're already doing it so we're not going to do anything' we say it's the second ringing of the bell and the reminder. Really we felt that the governor was reemphasizing the need to wear masks to protect each other, where it is difficult to almost impossible to invoke but it doesn't come as a threat. It's just a strong appeal that's put in the best mandate you could possibly get so we would pass that along to our congregation as we have been doing it so we repeat the appeal to continue to serve one another in that capacity.

Harry: I can't hardly go through a day on hearing a discussion about the wearing of the mask. Scientifically mask do help because before they were required you would see a dentist wearing one every time they work on you as a patient. Then there are others who say 'no' the mask creates a petri dish of your own diseases for you etc. I didn't take a lot of biology courses and I don't have a premed degree but there comes a time in life, for instance, when I step on an airplane and I depend on the expertise of others, unless they are using that for another agenda and that's why I keep my eye out. I'm grateful for the way our governor and the administration keeps couching it in the protection of God-given rights and freedoms in terms of general welfare and not targeting any one group, as I see other states doing. You have to have the wisdom and ability to see what our governor is doing and see what other governors are doing and not attribute to our governor what they are doing when you see something demonstrably different, unless there is a character issue where someone is being deceptive or if there is a secret agenda that is clearly there. I believe our governor has the ability to take us to the next level where we need to be and I'm going to trust that. Be always alert, always thoughtful, always prayerful but move forward always in good faith.

Bruce: I'd like to give a brief story and then move to the first question. Years ago Dr. Paul Perry, who used to be one of our beloved elders, delivered our first child Jake and during a long delivery there were complications that were coming. So Dr. Perry turned to me and said 'Bruce, you're going to have to make some decision here.' He started talking through all the things that were happening and I stopped him to tell him we made this decision months ago when we chose him to be our doctor and I had no idea what he was talking about. I told him 'you do the best you can do and if you will treat Sonya (my wife) like she was your daughter and Jake like he was your grandchild then I'll be fine.' Paul immediately went into action but that was a benchmark action for me – for me to try not to be what I wasn't. So you pick those people in your life and trust them.

I am encouraged because I believe the lines for us have fallen in pleasant places, they're not perfect but we're blessed to live in America and in the state of Alabama. For our governor to have made that declaration especially about places of worship, let's not miss that, that was a bold

step. The statement of religious worship being constitutionally protected was a praise to our Lord and that we live in the state of Alabama. We still have a lot of work to do in the state of Alabama but I praise the Lord for that.

We have two questions that came out before you preached your sermon on the statement 'He descended into hell' from the Apostles' Creed but we held them until you preached it. The first question has to do with hell – what's the difference in the lake of fire and hell?

Harry: The word hell is a translation of the Old Testament word Sheol and the New Testament word that replaces Sheol with hades. In the Apostles' Creed, it is an accurate translation but an inadequate translation because it doesn't say everything that is being said by using Sheol and hades. Sheol and hades are the intermediate state and because of sin there is an intermediate state whereby the soul goes to. When you die something unnatural happens. You had an immortal body and an immortal soul when you were born that were fastened together and one with each other, like two threads in one cloth but they weren't meant to be separated. Because sin brings physical death as well as spiritual death and eternal death, they are separated when you die for your body goes back to the dust and your soul to the place of the dead or the realm of the dead or the region of the dead.

Hades has two dimensions to it. Dimension number one is a place of blessing for believers. It is also called paradise or Abraham's bosom or gathered to the fathers of the faith. But it is not the final state of blessing. It is the intermediate state of blessing. Dimension number two is for unbelievers and they go to part that is for torment. We see that in the story Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus as Lazarus goes to the place of blessing and the rich man goes to the place of torment but both are in the place of the dead which is the intermediate state. That's where Jesus went and that's why it's important in the Apostles' Creed. Jesus had a true human soul and when He was crucified, dead and buried, His body went to the grave/tomb and His soul went to hades translated hell but He went to the place of the dead, that dimension of hades called paradise.

There is another word for hell that is referring to the eternal state so the intermediate state will be replaced at the second coming of Christ with an eternal state. The eternal state of blessing is the new heavens and the new earth. You will not be spending eternity floating on a cloud. You will be in a new heavens and a new earth with a glorified body. The unbeliever will no longer be in an intermediate state of torment, for they will be in the eternal state of torment and it has two names. The eternal state is Gehenna, the valley of Hinnom, where the smoke goes up forever, the place of eternal torment which has two factors – one of absolute isolation in outer darkness and the other factor is thirst and that's why it's called the lake of fire. It is the place of eternal condemnation. The devil and all the fallen angels that followed him, his demons and all unbelievers, those who have rejected the truth in all of creation and in His Word, will spend eternity with the consequences of their rebellion against God that they have fallen short of the glory of God and rejected the grace of God, in that eternal torment.

That brings up the word heavens so when the Bible says the heavens plural and the earth, I believe the Bible teaches of three heavens thus the plurality of its use. The first heaven is the heaven of creation as the atmosphere extends out into outer space. The second heaven is the abode of the spiritual creation, the angels. Periodically God brings them from that heavens into our creation and they make appearances. The angels are then allowed in certain instances to appear in the third heavens which is the dwelling place of the throne of God. Paul said he was caught up into the third heavens (II Corinthians 12:2). The third heavens is where Jesus

ascended back to, having descended all the way to His body in the grave, His soul to hades that dimension called paradise and on the cross He endured the eternal torment of Gehenna, the lake of fire and after He bore the wrath of God for us, He said 'It is finished.' There is the only time in history that hell has been on earth. It was the Gehenna, lake of fire hell that was poured out upon Christ on the cross. In the victory of the cross His soul went to paradise, even as He told the thief on the cross he would be with Him in paradise.

This is important because the reality is that this will happen to everyone that is here. When you die, if Jesus doesn't come back first, your body will go to the grave – dust to dust. Then God at the second coming of Jesus will raise it incorruptible with a new body and reunite it to your soul so you will have a new body with a perfect soul for all eternity to dwell in a new heavens and a new earth. Your soul will go to the place of the dead, paradise, Abraham's bosom. The Lord is there. Because this was true of Jesus this will be true of you. According to the Psalmist He will not abandon your body to corruption or your soul to Sheol. Therefore the third day Jesus' body was raised and the human soul of Jesus came forth which was united in the transfigured eternal body that was given to Jesus and forty days later in that eternal body He ascended to the third heavens to place of the right hand of the Father. From there He shall come again to judge the living and the dead. Your final state will be a resurrected body from the grave and the resurrected soul from paradise united and you will be brought into a new heavens and a new earth with your new body.

Bruce: This doesn't just come up when someone asks you about the Apostles' Creed for it comes up other times as well, although that does happen often times, but this topic tends to come up when a loved one dies and I have used your information here to tell others when I'm asked and it's been very helpful. They need to know what has happened to that loved one. I encourage people to send this to others when asked about this topic.

Harry: I do hear people say 'I don't say the part in the Apostles' Creed about 'He descended into hell'' then you have just joined the liberal church because they have removed it. I will ask them why they won't say it and they will say because they don't think He went to hell – the lake of fire – and I respond 'neither do the writers of the Apostles' Creed.' Those who wrote the creed are fully aware that Christ said on the cross 'It is finished!' What was finished? It was the separation from God under torment – that is what was finished. Matthew 27:46 says [46] *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* The writers heard, know and read in the Bible Jesus' cry of dereliction under the anathema of God on the cross. They know Gehenna came to Him on the cross and they know He said 'It is finished!' on the cross and obviously they are not talking about that.

So what are the writers of the Apostles' Creed talking about? They are talking about the fact that Jesus died a true human man death. His body goes to the grave and His soul goes to hades – that has two dimensions with one of those being paradise. Grant it I wish we still used the Greek word hades or we'd say Sheol or He went to the place of the dead, when we confess the creed because He didn't go to the torment dimension of hades but to the place of blessing (paradise dimension). People need to hear you say that because one day they will go there and they need to know that Jesus has already gone there and paid for it in victory. When they die if they are a believer their soul will go to hades, paradise, to the place of blessing but it's only the intermediate state and again if they are not a believer they will also go to hades but to the

torment dimension of hades. They will not be left there – the body will be raised and the soul will be reunited with the body. That’s why we follow Jesus who was crucified for us, who died for us and raised for us. When He comes again you whose soul is in paradise/hades will come forth, reunited with your body and be made like Him and that’s why it’s important to fully confess all the work of Jesus because that work secures our salvation and becomes the pattern of His work in us.

Bruce: One of our members sent in a question about an article or heard an interview with Tony Evans and he made a reference in the article that his church was adopting a police station so the question was, does Briarwood have any outreach to local police?

Harry: Yes, and thank you for the question. I know the ‘adopt a police station’ sounds good but that would really be counterproductive for us. We are served by four different departments locally – Hoover, Vestavia, Jefferson County and Shelby County. We have decided to pursue this relationally with organizational impact instead of organizationally adopt a station. Under the leadership of Briarwood High School and the students the last couple of years they have honored the military, first responders and our police force at the homecoming game. Secondly, under our security officer, Jason Springfield, along with Matt Moore, our administrator, we have established wonderful relationships not only with the police departments I’ve mentioned but also with the fire departments as well. So in other words, we have pursued it relationally and that has led to organizational participation.

For instance, we have our staff on call for those agencies as unpaid volunteer chaplains for them. So they know they can call on us through Jason or Matt. Back when the shooting of the Dallas officers and the demoralization occurred, they invited us over and Bruce actually went and had prayer with the police agencies at that time. It was a wonderful prayer meeting. So we keep exploring ways to minister to them. There are other things we’ve done but at the moment I can’t think of them but we’ve found the best way to be supportive of these agencies is through relationships with them and availability to all of them through all their rankings. Instead of giving them events we participate in those events where they believe we can be most helpful and praise the Lord for the commitments of the leadership of our police agencies and their desire to open up dynamics of spiritual engagement that we can have in their lives. We are thankful for this relationship that we enjoy with them and to the overflow to the Birmingham Police Department as well.

Bruce: We have benefited so much from those relationships. Without going into specifics of different situations, police officers face some incredibly difficult situations that get thrown on them in a matter of seconds and those are not easily dealt with and processed. So we have had the opportunity to seek to minister to them over a period of time and the reason we get those opportunities is because we have built those relationships. They get to come to our facility and have different types of training, meetings and exercises which is a tremendous blessing for us and benefit for them.

Harry: I remember someone seeing when they were at our facility one time and asked alarmingly ‘What’s happening at Briarwood?’ It was during a time that we let them use our facility for a training event that helps them get ready for certain kinds of attacks they may face, but we’re grateful to do that for them and also mingle with them in these training events.

In my pre-Christian life, when my baseball career had pretty much gone up in ashes because of my lifestyle of dissipation yet I was married and I was umpiring in my spare time. As I did that I eventually received an offer to become a professional umpire and at the same time I was changing my major in college because I was going back to school after my wife, Cindy, finished her degree and I was going to change it to law enforcement. I was talking through this with my dad and he said to me “Son, are you an idiot? Those are two callings/ two vocations. One, you never do something right for someone is always second guessing you. Two, at best in both of those callings it’s only the partner that appreciates you and what you did when you did it well. Thirdly, you see the worst side of people constantly and it can be so demoralizing, depressing and discouraging. So you better think if you have what you need to do that.”

Every time I see police officers facing these unbelievable situations in this world of a canceled culture, my heart goes out to them because they see and experience the worst, they have to exercise self-control and they all need to be accountable. We need to weed out the bad ones who are in that job for the wrong reasons. They all need training but when I look at them I think of what they see every single day, the fact they may not come home that day and they are the first line of stopping the chaos that sin brings to a culture, including violence as well as theft, robbery and intimidation. So we need to pray for them and build those relationships.

I hope we keep doing this better and better. I think it’s much more than a sign that says ‘we’ve adopted this station.’ I think it’s really a personal relationship that they need so I want to encourage our members to appreciate in any way they can what these people do for a living. Whenever I’m out and about and see them I try and buy their lunch. I’m sure they can buy their own meal but I just want them to know I appreciate them and what they do. There are all kinds of things you can do personally but do it in the name of the Lord. You can say something like this, ‘Hey I go to Briarwood Presbyterian Church, I love Jesus, I appreciate what you do’ then shake their hand and thank them. You can buy them a meal or give them a cup of coffee, but thank them for what they do.

Bruce: As you were saying that I was just trying to imagine you as a law enforcement agent as you walk to my window to give me a ticket and you say ‘I’ve got five things to say to you’ and they are all alliterated that includes a life takeaway. I think you’d look pretty good in that brimmed hat but I’m just trying to imagine that encounter with you at a traffic stop.

Harry: It would be a fun encounter I’m sure and I’m trying to imagine the sarcastic reply you would give me through the window if I would arrest you or not.

Bruce: I gave up sarcasm minutes ago so I’m good on that. Now I have an update to give. We had a story this past week from our mission’s pastor, Bryan Wintersteen, of a young Chinese lady who in the midst of the difficulties and restrictions had engaged in a Bible reading program and eventually became a Christian. Praise the Lord for that but there is follow up to this. God is not done with this young Chinese lady’s situation. She has begun to tell her friends about Christ. She is an international student at UAB but she reached out to a friend in Utah and was able to get this friend in Utah to participate in the online Bible reading that this young Chinese student was a part of. One of our volunteers who was a part of this online Bible reading program was able to lead this person in Utah to Christ. So as we rap up this Q&A time praise the Lord that He is at work in the midst of all this crisis and pandemic we are all going through.

Harry: That is what we are here for. Every morning my wife, Cindy and I pray ‘God, we don’t know how in this present distress You are going to use it but please help Briarwood stay on mission, on message and in ministry even with the challenges, even with the restrictions, even with limitations and even with fears that are out there. Please help us do that.’ I was so encouraged when I saw that follow up as well. I do want to thank the Lord for our international ministry, our international pastor, Taylor Barnes and the work he is doing during this present distress plus our mission’s pastor Bryan who has so much to oversee. I thank the Lord for our national and world missions and our missionaries out there facing this present distress as well. When I hear things like this here we are back to the Gospel of John where Andrew found Jesus and then Andrew found Peter to introduce him to Jesus and then through Peter 3,000 found Jesus. Here we are seeing that glorious chain reaction of God’s grace that is at work whereby God calls someone and saves someone and then as the founder of the Salvation Army says ‘it’s one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread and then they shared it with someone else.’ If you know enough to be saved you know enough to tell people about your Savior, to start leading people to your Savior. We just heard a great example of this in that follow up with the young Chinese lady. So praise the Lord and maintain seeing people come to Christ and be discipled. Pray for the follow up of these two international students and our international ministry as well our other ministries that are continuing. Continue to pray that God will give us thankfulness and fruitfulness. There is more to come on our questions so please continue sending them. The Lord bless you and keep you because Jesus was forsaken for you, you are accepted and kept in Him and through Him.

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 in our future Q & A time.