

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Eighteen

July 26, 2020 • Sunday Evening

This is our substitutionary study in place of our regular Sunday evening studies. I'd like to start our Q & A by giving you a devotional thought. I like the way the Bible uses greetings like grace and peace, for it is by grace that I'm saved and kept with the Lord. Peace is the blessing of God's work of grace and that's why the blessing is given, grace and peace and not peace and grace. The result and blessing of God's saving grace is peace.

The Bible says we have two dynamics of peace or two blessings of peace. One is called peace with God. The other is called the peace of God. Peace with God is an objective, dare I say legal declaration of peace. The peace of God is a subjective, dare I say existential or experiential blessing of peace.

The peace with God we find in Romans 5:1 which says *[1] Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* In other words, our enmity against God that is our sin and our rebellion has been subdued in three ways. One, He has called us away from ourselves/our sin and to Himself. Secondly, He has gloriously given us a new heart, we were born again. So we were in rebellion and God called us and gave us a new heart—we've been born again. II Corinthians 5:17 says *[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* Thirdly, He has removed our sin record and in its place has given us a righteousness filled record. It's called the righteousness of God.

I love Romans 1:16–17 which says *[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”* II Corinthians 5:21 says *[21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* So we have peace with God for our rebellion has been subdued and we've been called to Him. Our sinful heart has been removed because we have been born again and have been given a new heart that is in His hands. Then our sinful record has been eradicated through the atoning work of Christ and now we have the righteousness of Christ that makes us acceptable in the Beloved One that is God's Son our Savior Jesus.

We also have the peace of God which we see in Philippians 4:6–7 which says *[6] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* The peace of God will guard your heart in Christ Jesus. In other words, Jesus will stand sentry, guard, over your heart in the midst of a broken world and in the midst of our own inadequacies of our Christian life. He will still work patiently and persistently with us and keep us.

I so enjoy the time at the beginning and end of our Sunday morning services when I get the opportunity to say 'May the Lord be with you' and responsively the congregation says 'and also with you.' What does the Lord do with us? He keeps us and that's why I say in the benediction 'May the Lord's face shine upon you and may the Lord keep you.' So God's saving grace is not only giving us peace with God but it gives us the peace of God so that we have a settled sense of security in Jesus Christ. That's why we have assurance of our salvation—peace with God—and assurance within our salvation due to the peace of God.

Last week I did a study from the Apostles' Creed on the affirmation 'He descended into hell' which has the most questions asked about in this creed and due to that study I have received a number of questions. This is one of the reasons we have this Q & A time and perhaps people can tend to receive some bad answers but to me there are not really bad questions for with most questions, if you have it, someone else most likely has it as well. So Bruce I know you have collected the questions that we will walk our way through in this Q & A time.

Bruce: This past week the staff here at Briarwood has spent time fielding and answering questions about this past study you did on this affirmation and the encouraging thing is that some many people in their questions have revealed a strong desire to learn, to understand and to know. Most of the questions begin 'Let me see if I understand you correctly...' and many went back to listen to it again so this is very helpful for people. So let's get into these questions.

The first question is, after Christ's death and resurrection He ascended to the third heaven then how could Paul say in II Corinthians 5:8, 'we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord,' in other words do we have to wait entry into the third heaven in order to be fully at home with the Lord?

Harry: I think one of the most amazing statements is when Paul says he ascended into the third heaven. I'd like to point out that the Bible says 'God created the heavens (plural) and the earth.' I'm obviously doing some speculation here but I believe the first heaven is the creation of the physical heaven which is our surrounding atmosphere and then as it extends into the universe. I believe the second heaven is the abode or realm or the residence of the spiritual creation. In other words, God said in Jesus that He made all things visible and invisible and He speaks of principalities and powers. I think what He is thinking of there is the angelic world. So God created man—male and female—in His image and gave us the earth and the created atmospheric heaven which is our realm. It's my personal opinion that Sheol/hades, the place of the departed souls, is within the context of that second heaven where the spiritual beings abide—angelic beings.

Although periodically angels are given bodily appearances and they are sent in ministry to us in this world. That is why the Bible says that in the blessing of hospitality some have entertained angels and not known it (Hebrews 13:2). There was a time that Abraham and Sarah created a meal for angels. They not only had two angels there but they also had a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ—a Christophany. But the abode of the spiritual is what I think is in the second heaven.

The third heaven is what I believe is the throne of God and is surrounded with the angels that are brought into the third heaven—the cherubim and the seraphim—who are there to give praise to the Lord in all of His regal glory. I think Paul in some sense was brought into that realm as he was given the Word of God and he doesn't count that as some everyday experience by any means. So that's what I think Paul is speaking of in terms of the third heaven. I don't think we'll ever go to the third heaven as our abode—Why?

I believe when we die we still have the earth and the heavens, the atmospheric heaven and the spiritual heaven. Sheol or hades is the place of the departed souls and has two dimensions—one of torment and one of blessing/comfort in the presence of the Lord. Both are the intermediate state. Gehenna, the lake of fire, will be the final state of torment. The Lord tells us in Psalm 139 that if our bed is in Sheol, He is there so we are with the Lord, being comforted in that intermediate state if we know the Lord.

When Jesus returns, the created heavens and the earth, I believe will be rolled up and done away with. It's the idea of a transforming act of this earth and this heaven which I think in comparison is going to happen to your body. Your body is going to be corrupt and then be raised incorruptible. I believe the Lord is going to bring the judgement of fire upon the earth and the heavens and then He will roll it out in a new heavens and a new earth. You will not spend eternity in the third heavens for your final state will be in the new heavens and the new earth. In other words, we are going to have a glorified body joined with a perfected soul. You are not going to the new heavens and the new earth when you die but the place of the departed souls—hades—and your body will go into the grave (that is where the body is corrupted but will be raised incorruptible when the Lord returns as it is reunited with your soul.)

Bruce: During conversations I had this week it didn't seem to sink in with many of them that you had made the statement about 'He is with you in Sheol and today you will be with Me in Paradise' and somehow they got in their mind that they are in this intermediate state but they are not with Jesus yet, that they are waiting to be with Jesus.

Harry: Jesus will be with you and in fact He has already been there. His soul went there. He had a true human body and a true human soul. That is why in the development of the Apostles' Creed there were about three different edits over a period of time. One of the edits had to do with the phrase 'He descended into hades.' Hades is the concept they were talking about. I do not believe they were speaking about Gehenna. Jesus had already bore the same dynamic as Gehenna which is the judgment of God's wrath for eternity for our sins, when He was separated from God the Father on the cross as He bore our sins and the unmixed wrath of God. I Corinthians 15:21 says [21] *For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.* So Christ is a true human and we know where His body went—it went to the tomb but that's not where His soul went. He told us where His soul went (was going) while He spoke to the thief on the cross and said 'Today you will be with Me in paradise (Luke 23:43).' Another term for paradise is Abraham's bosom (Luke 16) and that is the state of blessing in the intermediate state—which is hades. It is not the final state of blessing for the Lord is now preparing for us the final state of blessing.

Jesus says in John 14:1–3, [1] *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”* So our final place with Him will be a new heavens and a new earth but the intermediate state is a state of blessing and there is no other blessing than being with the Lord. You will be with the Lord but it will be strictly in a spiritual existence because the body is in the grave. When the body is resurrected and reunited with the soul then it will be an everlasting existence of body and soul—glorified body that will not age and a perfected soul that will not need to be comforted any more. In the Bible it says the intermediate state is a place of comfort as we see in Luke 16 when Lazarus was being comforted. In the final state we won't need to be comforted for it will be everlasting bliss of being with the Lord. Our beatific vision will have been fulfilled with a glorified body and a perfected soul. We shall look upon Him with our full existences for God made us for all eternity.

Bruce: There are a series of questions about the separation of the body and the soul so I'm going to join these questions together. The first question is about the bodies of Enoch and Elijah.

Enoch and Elijah did not experience a physical death for they were taken by the Lord, so what happens to their bodies, do they subsequently return to dust and their souls depart to paradise? The next question is about Moses' body, where he died a physical death in Jude 9 the arch angel Michael disputes with the devil about the body of Moses and presumably this occurred before the body returned to dust, is that right? Then the third question asks about the bodies at the transfiguration where Moses, Elijah and Christ were all talking with each other, so how did they get their bodies back in order for them to have that conversation—were they just instantaneously reunited to appear with Christ and then their bodies returned back to dust and their souls to paradise?

Harry: I have to confess as I read these questions the depth of thinking of our people that wrote these questions was extraordinary, their love for God's Word and their heart to learn. Some think this would upset me but it doesn't. What upsets me is I wish I could get it all in a 35 to 40 minute sermon so that people wouldn't have to have questions. Some of this I have covered in the sermons so some of it didn't connect and I take responsibility for that but overall I almost get emotional over the learning heart and the desire to understand God's Word to fit all the pieces together. By the way, it's one of the greatest arguments against atheism. Are there any trees or rocks that are processing anything like this? Are there any animals out there that are working through any issues like this? No, we ask questions like this because we're made in the image of God. We know we came from somewhere, we exist for a purpose and we know that God doesn't do things irrationally. God's ways may be beyond us and they may be supra-rational and supra-logical but they are never irrational or illogical. There will be things I can't totally explain, either I don't have the information yet in God's Word or God has left us to these places to understand that there are some things you can't totally get to a conclusion because you either don't have enough information or because of our frailties we're not able to process that information. I do think these particular questions we can begin to take a look at.

I'll start with the Enoch and Elijah question. There are three outliers. In other words, everybody I'm talking to, unless the Lord sovereignly decides to do it a different way, there is coming a day that if Jesus doesn't come back first, will die. When you die it is the separation of the soul from the body. James 2:26 says *[26] For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.* Through this understanding of what happened to Jesus—true body and true soul—one can understand what will happen to theirs. Your body will go to the grave but we set it aside with reverence. That is why the history of the Old and New Testament burials are not cremations—that is the despair of the false religions because they have no hope whatsoever and their only hope is that they don't come back in dis-existence. In the Old and New Testaments the body is always laid aside in reverence in anticipation of a resurrection one day. We are not platonic in our view of life—where the physical is bad and the spiritual is good. No, when God made both physical and spiritual it was good and then sin brought a curse on both physical and spiritual. When you became a Christian you were born again spiritually and one day your body which was corrupt will put on incorrupt and the mortal will put on immortality. That is the way we look at burial because burial is not the final word. Dust will return to dust and then we'll come forth at the resurrection with dust regathered into a new body for a new heavens and a new earth which will be a spiritual body but a real body.

When we die our souls go where all of the souls of the departed go and I believe that is the second heavens—the heavens of the spiritual. That place in the Old Testament was called

Sheol and in the New Testament it is called hades. It has an intermediate state of torment and an intermediate state of blessing.

Now we have three outliers in the Bible—Enoch, Elijah and Moses. Enoch and Elijah are outliers because the Bible indicates they did not go through the process of death. Enoch walked with God and was no more. Elijah was taken up into the presence of the Lord. Then we have the third one that Jude points us to which was taken from the extra canonical book called Enoch. It is a quote that has now been affirmed to be actually true because it's include in the book of Jude and God's Word is inerrant. After the death of Moses, when he went up and the Lord told him he would die, before he crossed over, but he could see into the Promised Land and he died. Now we are told that Michael the arch angel has the task of bringing the body of Moses and that is really interesting to us because we're not told that of any other body except the body of Jesus that was resurrected back to life with His soul. So Moses did die but yet his body and soul were brought forth into eternity. Why did God do that?

I'm going to give two suggestions. Number one is that God knows His sovereign plan and God's sovereign plan was that He was going to send His Son and His Son was going to go to a cross where He would be separated from God and die an atoning death but before He goes on to Mount Calvary to suffer for us He was taken first days earlier before He would go to Jerusalem to what is called the mountain at Galilee. At that place He would be lifted up before Peter, James and John and on either side of Jesus is Moses and Elijah. For Moses and Elijah to be lifted up in glorified bodies their bodies would have to be present. I think Michael the arch angel went to get the body of Moses because God knows He is going to have a glorified Moses to be on one side of His exalted Son and He will have a glorified Elijah on the other side of His exalted Son. So both Elijah and Moses are there in body and soul into that purpose they will be used for at the Mount of Transfiguration. What does that do? Elijah was the one that was over the Prophets. What is Moses? Moses is not only a Prophet but he is also the one that gives us the Law. So on this mount of transfiguration we have the Law and the Prophets pointing to who? Jesus. Then after the resurrection it says that Jesus began with the Law and the Prophets to explain Himself in all the Scriptures.

So I don't think God brought Moses' body and Elijah bodily into eternity ahead of the plan of everyone else who will have a resurrected body at the day of Christ's coming for no reason at all. There is one reason I would see that He would have done for that purpose. So here is my second one. Whenever God does something in the future, He gives many times an immediate picture of what He is going to do in the future. For instance, many times when God gives a prophecy the Prophet will give an immediate prophecy that is fulfilled. An example of this is when Moses says God will deliver Israel from Egypt and Moses was given three miracles he could do in the presence of Pharaoh to show He was going to ultimately deliver His people. The three miracles were the preliminary miracles to show that.

I believe that Enoch, Moses and Elijah are three pre-resurrection declarations of what God is going to do. In other words, they become types of our resurrection. So one says 'can God do this?' Yes. Paul spoke about of a resurrection at the Areopagus and they laughed at him because they thought 'who would want it' and two 'how could that possibly happen' so we see people ridiculing the notion of the resurrection.

Go tell people today in our secularized country that you believe in the resurrection and watch the ridicule and mocking that takes place. So what God has done for us is He has given us three affirmed statements in the Scripture and to some degree in history that He will be able to raise us, our bodies. People will ask me 'my body is decaying and will decompose so how can

God do that?’ The same God that can take them up bodily can take that dust and bring it together even as He did for Adam—He can do that for you. So I believe that Enoch and Elijah are not normative for us—they are outliers. For what happened to them will not happen to us.

We know we will be present with the Lord in that intermediate state of paradise for the Bible gives us three reasons for this. One is that absent from the body is present with the Lord. The body is in the grave but our soul is in that place of paradise, that dimension of hades that is a place of comfort and blessing. Secondly, we know the Lord will be with us because He told the thief on the cross He would be with him in paradise on that day. Thirdly, we know it because the Bible says in the Old Testament (Psalm 139) that even if we make our rest in Sheol He is there with us. Sheol is the Old Testament term for hades. So now we have three outliers that are types of our resurrection bodies and I have given you my two reasons where one He had a purpose for Moses and Elijah at the Mount of transfiguration which needed their glorified bodies to be fulfilled as they would point to Jesus who would be lifted up and secondly, they along with Enoch become types of the resurrection we are all promised in Jesus Christ.

Bruce: There is encouragement in the answer within that answer and that is, God knew what He was doing. God is sovereign and always in control. We will end with a question we meant to answer in the last session. This is a question I have had on numerous occasions in my life. Why did God allow Satan to live and reap destruction after he rebelled, why didn’t God just put an end to Satan right then, before he could deceive Adam and Eve?

Harry: This is one of the greatest questions and it’s what we call the question of theodicy. That is, how did sin get here, why is sin here and the background question is, so why didn’t God stop Satan from falling into sin? Once Satan fell into sin, why not get rid of him and not allow him to do what he did in the Garden? I want to give a couple of answers here and we always go to the Bible for our answers.

We know that sin does not come from God. God has ordered its presence, God is sovereign and this doesn’t take Him by surprise. In the Bible He tells us the evil that is here, have I not declared the day and the night, so God has ordered it but He doesn’t author it. He is not the author of sin for there is no sin within Him. God cannot be tempted to sin and He does not sin. Therefore sin is here from Satan’s fall and the fall of Adam in the sin, thus sin is produced.

I realize I haven’t answered the question and that has just furthered your dilemma. So if God is sovereign over it and ordered it but did not author it, why didn’t He order it not to be there? I’m going to give you two aspects of this answer and here is where a Christian world and life view gets tested. A Christian world and life view is built on one significant principle. It was reclaimed in the Reformation—it is *solus Deo Gloria* - where everything exists for the glory of God. In other words, if anything is here, it cannot be here unless in some it contributes to God’s glory.

So what is God’s glory? God’s glory is the outshining and revelation of His magnificent, majestic perfections of His character and His attributes—all of God’s attributes are being displayed in their harmony, in their brilliance, and in their glory. In other words, the reason for everything is not us. We exist for the glory of God. Why does God make you? He made you for His glory. Why does God save you? It is for the praise of His glorious grace. Why does God sustain you? It is so that you might glorify Him with all that you are and all that you have in breadth and in life.

So how does that apply to how God ordered presence of sin and did not prevent its presence? Why is that? It is because there are attributes of God you would have never ever have known without the presence of sin. For instance, God made you for His glory, God saved you to the praise of His glorious grace and the opposite of grace is sin. Romans 5:20b says [20b] *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*. Therefore if sin was not present you would never know of God's attribute of grace, patience, mercy and justice. There are attribute after attribute you would never know if sin was not present. Now there are some attributes you could know partially but you could not know fully because without sin you could not see the fullness of that. You can see that God is just without sin but you can't see the fullness of the justice without sin.

To answer why did God order the presence of sin without authoring sin and its purpose? Its purpose like everything else, is the majestic brilliance, outshining, effulgence of God's glory and that's why it exists. There are attributes of God we now see that we would never have seen without His glorious declaration of grace, mercy and patience. We would not have known what it means to have peace with God and the peace of God. This is why I believe God allowed and ordered the fall of Satan, the fall of Adam, yet He did not author those sins but ordered their presence as He brings forth the very glory of His attributes that we would never have known without it.

If your first catechism question of life, is what is the chief end of God, then you have a problem but if your first catechism question is, what is the chief end of man, then now you're on track. The chief end of man is created, saved and sustained—creation, redemption and providence. The chief end of man is to glorify God and now in Christ you can enjoy Him forever and not be cast away to the eternal state of Gehenna—the lake of fire, but be with Him in perfected body and soul for all eternity in a new heavens and a new earth. You can says John 3:16 which says [16] ***For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life***, for you would have never known how much God loves you without the presence of sin and not perish in the lake of fire under His judgment in your sin, but will be with Him in the everlasting blessings of eternity. I'm so glad we're able to end this session at this point with this closing thought.

Know that you have a relationship with God that Adam could not have known prior to sin but I believe Adam did know after sin. It's not just a blessing of a paradise that you will be with the Lord and absent from sin, but it will be the eternal paradise—the eternal new heavens and new earth—for the redeemed sinners who will be able to sing what angels cannot sing and that is Amazing Grace. They long to know what we know and that is amazing grace. Jesus did not go to the cross to die for any fallen angels, but He did go to the cross to die for the sins of all of His people for all of eternity that we could not only know God's grace and sing God's grace but by His grace and mercy be with Him. That's why I chose the devotional at the beginning of this session—grace and peace.

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. Grace and peace to you all.