

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Nineteen

August 2, 2020 • Sunday Evening

I received so many notes of appreciation those who enjoy this podcast which is a substitute for our Sunday evening services during this pandemic time. We have no shortage of questions but before we get to the questions I'd like to start with a devotional thought from Philippians 2. Philippians 2:12–13 says [12] *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

This church in Philippi had its beginning when a jailer was converted, his household, Lydia, a business woman, a proselyte, and also a delivered slave girl who was a demoniac. It's a glorious testimony of how this church got started. It wouldn't be my pick for a core group but it's exactly what God gave to Paul when he started this church. Philippians is a letter back to the church at Philippi and it's the only church Paul allowed to support him financially that we know of, according to the evidence of Scripture.

Paul writes this epistle from prison and in this passage he calls them the 'beloved.' They were not only beloved by Paul but they were beloved by God. When Paul says '*as you have always obeyed*' he means the evidence of salvation is obedience. It's not the cause of salvation or the ground of salvation or the foundation of salvation but it is the evidence of it. It will never be perfect otherwise the Apostle Paul would not have to give this exhortation but it will be present. That is what marks out a believer – a desire to know and do God's Word by the grace of God, for the glory of God, with dependence upon the Spirit of God.

Then Paul tells them in his absence do it even more. Don't make your obedience only when the founding pastor is there but make your obedience out of your relationship to the Lord. Then he sums it up by saying '*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*' What does he not say? He doesn't say work for your salvation but he says work out your salvation. Salvation is something they already have through the work of Jesus but now bring it to manifestation, bring it to display – work it out. What God has worked in you, now work out of you. That is why Paul calls them to this growing, perfecting but not perfect, obedience in Christ for the glory of Christ. Fear and trembling is Biblical code language for worship. In other words, you not only have gathered worship, you have life worship. Your lifestyle of obedience is to be an act of worship before God.

Paul then make this wonderful statement of why you can work something out and that's because God Himself is working in. That God who is working in you is doing it for His own good will pleasure. Why do I have something to work out? It is because God sovereignly is working in me. So here are a few more thoughts. If God is working in then it will work out. It won't be perfect but it will be perfecting. Number two is that you can't work out unless God is working in. So the Christian life is an inside out experience of the grace of God sovereignly poured into us through the finished work of Christ by the power of the Spirit of God using the Word of God and then that works out in our life as a testimony.

Here we have the sovereignty of God and the human responsibility of man seemingly contradictory yet Paul puts them right together in a cohesive harmonious relationship. Why am I able to responsibly live for Jesus? It is because Jesus is at work within me. I have been asked 'do you believe in free will?' I believe in free moral agency but I believe our will is under the

bondage of sin until a sovereign God of His own good will and pleasure works in to break it. So I believe in a freed will that God by His grace frees us so that we can follow Him love Him and serve Him. The evidence of that is what He is doing so strive intentionally to obey yet don't trust your striving, trust God's striving within you. God working in you is what enables you to work out.

I want to give you another verse from Philippians and that is Philippians 1:6 which says *[6] And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

We need to get to the questions we have for this time but I do want to say that we will address a few more in this time related to my sermon from the Apostles' Creed where I dealt with the phrase 'He (Jesus) descended into hell' referring to Jesus' soul going to hades – the dimension of hades known as paradise – but for the next Q & A we will begin to address other questions not related to this due to the amount of questions we are getting.

Bruce: I will say if you are a member of our church I would encourage you to reach out to your community pastor or a small group where you may continue to have conversations about this topic that would help with perhaps questions we may not be able to get to. I'm going to now ask a series of questions back to back all related to this topic. The first one is, doesn't the New Testament present hades as hell and not an intermediate state?

Harry: The answer is yes and no. Yes it presents the fact that hades has a dimension of torment but it does not present hades as the final hell. That is something that is for a resurrected body and soul. Gehenna will be a place of torment for a resurrected body and soul. So it doesn't present it that way. It's not just one more term for hell but it is translated hell because of the inadequacy of our King James language to come up with the right term for it. It's the realm of the departed souls.

I believe there are three heavens described in the Bible and that's why it says 'God created the heavens (plural) and the earth.' The first heavens is the physical heavens. The second heavens is the place of the spiritual abode of the angels which is, I believe, post fall, the designated realm for the departed souls of those who have physically died which is a separation of the soul from the body. It has two dimensions – a place of comfort and assurance called paradise, also called Abraham's bosom and the second dimension is a place of torment but not the final state of torment or comfort. The final state will be both physical and spiritual – the final state of torment for unbelievers and the final state of blessing (eternal life with Christ) for believers with a glorified body and perfected soul in the new heavens and the new earth.

Bruce: This question has to do with the story you used from Luke 16 of Lazarus in Abraham's Bosom and the rich man. What is the location of Abraham and Lazarus in the story?

Harry: I believe they are in Sheol, the place of blessing called Abraham's Bosom and also called paradise. They are in the place of assured comfort and they are with the Lord. Sheol is the Old Testament term and the New Testament term is hades. Remember Psalm 139:8b says *[8b] If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there!* I don't believe this is referring to the eternal state of hell because the eternal state of hell is the absence of the felt presence of God. When Jesus bore our hell on the cross that's why He cried out the cry of dereliction of 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' So if God is present in the place of the departed souls that's another

indication this is not the final state of torment nor of blessing but it is a place where you will have presence with the Lord, just as the thief was with Jesus, then the resurrected ascended Jesus ministers to His people as they go to this place of paradise or a heavenly paradise where there is spiritual existence in the intermediate state. Quit thinking of it more as a location as it is a state. It is a state or a realm. This is the abode of the spiritual heaven, the abode of the angels and the departed souls.

Bruce: I think you hit a key perspective for many who heard the sermon were caught up in the location verses the state. It's as if they are trying to find this particular location as if has an address as to where is it. Speaking of Sheol the next question is, could Sheol have been a poetic term?

Harry: It's a term used in poetry but it's not a poetic term. It is a realm. It is a "destination" of the departed souls. As you read the Bible you will continually find the phrase 'descended to Sheol' so it is a spiritual realm for the souls where there is some kind of a recognition process. Now I don't know how the spiritual becomes recognizable but clearly there was recognition going on in terms of Abraham, Lazarus and the rich man. Jesus told the thief on the cross he would be with Him in paradise so clearly the criminal would be able to recognize Jesus and Jesus the criminal when Jesus died and His body went to the grave/tomb and His soul went to the place of the departed souls.

Bruce: The next question makes reference to Ecclesiastes 12:5b–7 which says *[5b] For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street. [6] Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; [7] then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.* (NASB) The question is, if there is a holding place why would Ecclesiastes 12 still refer to people being on earth while others are in their eternal home?

Harry: I really love all the questions but here is where I get a little frustrated. I have said several times not to think of this as a holding place. Don't even think of it as a place. It is a cognitive state of the soul and in some ways there is recognition that is taking place there. Everyone already believes in an intermediate state if you believe you are going to have a body in your final state because where is your loved one? Absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Their body is in the grave. So you already know that Jesus is going to resurrect that body and reunite it to that soul and wherever they are now is not their final state. The final state is a glorified body with a perfected soul. The intermediate state is a perfected soul in the presence of the Lord in the intermediate realm of paradise or heaven (the second heavens) but it's not the final state because Jesus is not through yet. It's not a place where you can make atonement, improve your status but it's a place of blessing, comfort and assurance. When Jesus comes back the bodies will be resurrected and the body will be reunited in a new heavens and a new earth from the Judgment Seat if you are in the Book of Life. Those in paradise are in the Book of Life. Those not in the Book of Life will have a resurrected body and their torment will not only be a spiritual torment, it will also include the dynamics of a glorified body in torment in a place called Gehenna. That would be the eternal state of the unbeliever (Gehenna) and the believer (the new heavens and the new earth).

This passage in Ecclesiastes is saying that in this present state come to the Lord – put your trust in the Lord. If you don't then on the day of death, your eternal destination is fixed. It is a fixed reality. Hebrews 9:27 says [27] *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* Ecclesiastes is not giving you everything that is going to take place. When *the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed* the body will return to the dust – from dust you came and to the dust you will return. We also know from other passages of Scripture that the body won't stay there. It will be resurrected – some to eternal life and some to eternal condemnation. The soul will also be united to that body. Again this passage is saying that in this present state, come to Christ – serve the Lord. That's the whole point of the book of Ecclesiastes – living life under the sun is empty, vanity, blowing in the wind so what you need now is to have the vitality of a relationship with God instead of the vanity of self-absorption, self-reliance, and self-exaltation as the heart produces idolatry – idol after idol. So come to the Lord now for in death it's a done deal for you will either spend eternity with the Lord or you will spend eternity under the judgment of God. This passage in Ecclesiastes is not giving the full description of everything that is going to happen but it's telling you that what happens in your present state is determinative of where your eternal state will be so come to the God of grace and glory who has given Himself for you.

Bruce: So our final question on the intermediate state is, couldn't heaven also be paradise, could they be synonyms and couldn't people be in heaven without bodies?

Harry: I believe that Sheol or hades is in the second heavens. I believe it is a spiritual heavenly existence but it's not the final state. The final state has a glorified body and a perfected soul. Why will Jesus raise the body to eternal life and raise the body to eternal condemnation for the unbeliever if there is not a bodily presence? The Bible tells us we are going to be like Jesus. Jesus has an eternal bodily presence so we will be able to see Him. Jesus didn't have that bodily presence prior to His Incarnation but part of His love for you is that He will have that glorified body that you will be able to see. You would not be able to look upon God without that glorified body veiling Christ in eternity. So you will be like Him – a perfected soul and a perfected body for all eternity. Eternal life is not just a harp in a cloud, floating in some esoteric existence. No, it's a real, resurrected, glorified body where the corruptible has put on the incorruptible and the mortal has put on immortality and a real perfected soul. Just as Jesus died and His soul went to paradise and His body went to the grave, He came forth, (after three days) His body came forth and was resurrected, forty days later He ascended and that becomes the promise for you. Your body, though corrupted by the dust, will be resurrected when He comes again. Your soul though in a place of blessing is not in the final state of blessing but it will be joined with a glorified body and you will have that for all eternity.

While the story Jesus uses in Luke 16 of Lazarus and the rich man, uses bodily language, because we can't think without concrete terms, it's not telling us they had a body there. Why do I know that? Luke 16:22 says [22] *The poor man (Lazarus) died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.* In other words, both died and were buried so we know they don't have a body there because the body was buried in the grave and awaits the day of resurrection yet they don't quit existing because the essence of their existence – made in the image of God – is their soul and there is a recognizable, spiritual existence of the soul in blessing for the believer but not the final location/state of blessing and torment for the unbeliever but not the final state of torment which is Gehenna.

Bruce: The next question is a much broader question and it goes to the compilation of the Bible. How did we get the Bible as we know it, as we have it now – Old Testament, New Testament – how was it compiled and when and how did they go about that?

Harry: We got the Bible from God. II Timothy 3:16–17 says *[16] All 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.* II Peter 1:21 says *[21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* Carried along is the same concept as by a ferry boat as they were ferried along as God gave us His Word through them – Prophets in the Old Testament and Apostles in the New Testament.

I sense this question is really going beyond that. I think the one who gave the question probably believes what I have already said so I believe what they really want to know is how did it happen. First of all, except for a few short passages of Scripture it was not canonical. It was a dynamic process. In other words, God used, chose and developed the humans that He was using with their personalities, education, burdens and passions, so the Bible is fully God as the Divine Author and fully human in the appointed authors. For instance you can see the difference in the way Peter writes and the way Paul writes or the difference in the way James writes and the way Jude writes. You can see their personalities, sense their education and their background and God used all of that. As they are writing they are using the language of the day, the geography of the day and the setting of the day. When they use the phrase ‘the sun setting’ in the Bible it’s not a scientific phrase but it’s called a phenomenal language for it’s what a real person would say in terms of experiencing life. They are talking as real people in real situations.

Furthermore, why the 66 books – 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament? When Jesus came to the earth His Bible was what we call the Masoretic Texts – the 39 books of the Old Testament. The popular Bible of the day, perhaps the English Standard Version of the day, was the Septuagint. So Jesus quotes from it continually which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. There is evidence that there were two centers of great Biblical study. One was in Alexandria in Egypt and the library there was noteworthy and later was fully Christianized through the work of the Gospel in North Africa which became the center of Christianity, but then was wiped out under the Islamic movement centuries later. In the Alexandria library with the Jewish scholars is what we called the Alexandrian Canon. The Jerusalem area had what is known as the Palestinian Canon. It seems as if the dominate canon was the Palestinian and it eventually became the affirmed text.

The church over the centuries, moving into the medieval ages, begin to add books to the Old Testament and those were called apocrypha. Another term for that is pseudepigrapha with pseudo meaning false and pigrapha meaning writings – false writings. But the church assuming authority over the Scriptures added to the Canon of the Scriptures. Then came the Reformation and the fundamental issue of the Reformation is sola Scriptura, meaning the Scripture alone, therefore the church does not make the Bible for Jesus. This is very important. Jesus makes the Bible for the church. That’s why we call it the Textus Receptus – the received text. The church does not determine the Bible, the church receives the Bible. Therefore the Bible is affirmed. So the Reformers went back and removed the apocrypha/pseudepigrapha and went back to the 39 books of the Old Testament – the Palestinian Canon – which would have been what Jesus would have been using as well as the Apostles.

Then what do you add to it? It is the 27 books of the New Testament. They are received that are given through those who heard from Jesus and were affirmed by signs, wonders and miracles as the authoritative authors of the Scripture. The Bible is its own authority. It's not established by the Prophets or Apostles or the church but it is established by God through the Prophets and Apostles for the church to be received, thus we have it – the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. The Bible is the Word of God. It doesn't become the Word of God, it is the Word of God to be received by the church.

This is very important to understand this because the Bible says in Hebrews 1:2a, *[2a] but in these last days He (God) has spoken to us by His Son.* Then He gives us warnings. Revelation 22:18–19 says *[18] I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, [19] and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.* Basically if anyone adds or subtracts to this Book let him be anathema.

Many come to me telling me about someone having a dream from God, etc. and I have no doubt that God can use dreams and circumstances to inspire people in His illumination of the Scripture, but God is not revealing His Word. It is through, already been done. In fact, you put yourself in a position of anathema if you add to or take away from the Scriptures. God has finally spoken in His Son and confirmed it to us through the Apostles, bearing witness with them by signs, wonders and miracles. This is also seen in I Corinthians 14, I Peter and II Timothy 3:10–17, affirming these basic truths. So the church receives the Bible from the Lord and the Bible affirms the Bible. Sola Scriptura – the Scripture alone – is not only our rule of faith and practice but the Scripture affirms the Scripture.

Bruce: I know through your ministry you have embraced different versions of the Bible that you have used to preach from, study, etc. and then another version would come along so how do you go about determining which version to use? In fact, when you are preaching and you quote a verse you will tend to quote it in a different version you are preaching from, which will have different key words you are emphasizing and you do acknowledge the reason you are using that version at the time. But as a believer trying to embrace the Bible how do you go about choosing which version (ESV, NASB, NIV, KJV, etc.)?

Harry: I do two things. Number one is fidelity and accuracy to the author and that is God through the Apostles and Prophets – who are the most competent, conscientious, capable translators of the Bible. The second principle is readability – it is put together in a way that it is readable in the English language. I was raised on the King James Version (KJV). My ministry life was in the New American Standard Version (NASV), which a phenomenally accurate English translation, word for word for I believe in literal equivalence, not dynamic equivalence. The second half of my ministry has been in the English Standard Version (ESV) because my denomination is using it and it is not only competent and contentiously committed to the principle of accuracy to the author, but I think it's more readable than the New American Standard Version for family devotions, personal devotions, as well as appropriate for Bible study itself. So sometimes I will quote for all three of these versions when I preach.

Some translations like the New International Version (NIV) elevate readability over accuracy in the final analysis therefore, while the NIV is helpful, I do not use it as a study Bible or a preaching Bible. We have people in our church that when I do Hebrew and Greek

explanations in a sermon sometimes I'll get insights and comments from them and these are people who have studied Hebrew and Greek in our seminary, Briarwood Theological Seminary (BTS). So you can skip all this if you want to take Hebrew and Greek at our seminary.

Bruce: I often times get questions about paraphrase versions of the Bible so how would you use those or would you?

Harry: A paraphrase is what I call a short commentary. What you have in a paraphrase is the author's interpretation, not translation. Your study Bible ought to be a direct translation – literal equivalent, not thought equivalent. To me, the NIV is somewhere between a translation and a paraphrase but there are some excellent paraphrases out there. I believe the best paraphrase is called the Amplified Bible. Then there is the Living Bible and The Message. Sometimes they will say they are translations but they are not. They are actually paraphrases which has the author's interpretation and the author may or may not be right.

I prefer a good direct study Bible and then I will go to two or three paraphrases to see how they interpreted that in the paraphrasing of the text. When I teach in seminary I'll have passages of Scripture assigned to my students and I will then have them paraphrase that in their own words because I think that's a good way to grapple with what the text actually says. Again, a paraphrase should not be your study Bible but a study tool.

Bruce: This is a wonderful way to end, to immerse ourselves in Scripture to embrace the mind of Christ and 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](mailto:askthepastor@briarwood.org) and we'll look forward to answering them, Lord willing, in our future Q & A time with Harry and Bruce. Grace and peace to you all.