

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Twenty

August 9, 2020 • Sunday Evening

We are doing this Q & A time in place of our Sunday evening worship due to the current pandemic we are in, although we long to getting back together again with God’s people. We have had such a positive response to this Q & A that we are thinking how we might incorporate this into the future. I’d like to begin with some thoughts from God’s Word.

Romans 10:13–17 says [13] *For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

[14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” [16] But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” [17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (that is the Spirit born Word from Christ – Ramah).

Paul is rhetorically putting this passage together, very much like a lawyer building a case. He starts out by saying ‘Do you want people to be saved, then people need to call upon the name of the Lord. Do you want people to call upon the name of the Lord, then you have to believe in Him, not just about Him. Do you want people to believe in Him, then this is very important, they have to hear Him, not just about Him.’ It’s just like Lazarus could not come out of the grave until he heard the voice of Christ say ‘Lazarus come forth’ and we can’t come out of our spiritual depravity because we’re dead in our sins, until Christ Himself speaks for us to come forth.

So how do we hear Him? We hear Him through preaching. God uses the foolishness of preaching and that’s why Jesus said ‘My sheep know My voice and they follow Me’ (John 10). It’s not just any preaching but it is through preachers who are sent by God. So how shall they preach unless they are sent? He sends them by His Spirit through His church. The external calling is by the church and the internal calling is by the Spirit. Then when Spirit-filled, Bible-honoring, Christ-exalting preaching takes place from those whom God has sent then something supernatural happens – Jesus Himself begins to speak to the hearts of His people. If they are lost, He speaks to call them to Himself in salvation and conversion. If they are saved, He speaks to them to console, convict, to equip, to disciple, to learn, to inspire, to encourage, but He is speaking to them. How do you know Biblical preaching? Those who listen don’t follow the preacher, they follow Jesus. Again, Jesus says in John 10:27, [27] *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*

I was recently on a two week study sabbatical and I’m so grateful for the caliber, commitment, heart and passion of our pastoral staff and that became the opportunity for six of pastors on staff to speak during two Sunday mornings. Three of them dealt with the grace of God and three of them dealt with the love of God. We didn’t announce who was speaking when although there were some who thought we should have informed people. We realize people may have shifted what service they attended due to personal affection but when someone asked me about who was preaching my answer was ‘Jesus, He will be the preacher for these are called men of God who are faithful to the Word of God, relying on the Spirit of God, with different gifts and different styles but Jesus owns the preaching of His Word to speak to the hearts of His people.’

So whenever I decide I don't want to hear preaching then I've basically told Jesus I don't want to hear Him.

That's why I try to tell people to forget the preacher and that's why the Geneva robe was used, it was used to block out the preacher. I Corinthians 1:21 says [21] *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly (foolishness) of what we preach to save those who believe.* I believe other than coming to Jesus, the most important decision you make in your life is what preaching you listen to, how you listen to it and actually the priority preaching takes in your life. So those are just some thoughts and now we'll get to the questions for this time we have together.

Bruce: A thought from your devotion to use an illustration that you have referred to several times dealing with sins in your life, you have said some sins God microwaved out of your life when you first became a Christian and others He used a crockpot. I think preaching is like the crockpot in my life. I'm amazed that I can sit under the preaching of God's Word primarily from you and it's as if God told you specifically what to say and He would have had to tell you that six months earlier to prepare it during the week yet I need that particular takeaway or observation right then. The second thing that just overwhelms me is the laws of the harvest where the fruit comes much later so the cumulative preaching and to see God's sovereignty in that where all of sudden you are confronted with something and have to deal with something, like the Corona virus or difficult questions. And now the Holy Spirit does that stuff of bringing back and reminding me of all truth, the vast majority of which was preached to me. I just love how God shows up in those two contexts.

Harry: I so appreciate that insight. Satan is going to do everything he can to destroy the preacher, preaching or the message. Secondly, he is going to do everything he can to distract you and detour you from preparing and prioritizing it. That's why he goes after preachers for if he strikes down the shepherds the sheep with scatter. That's why he tries to get the sheep to wander away from the preaching. I believe preaching is what pulls the trigger for life on life, small group discipleship. I believe it's not life on life small group discipleship for it pulls the trigger, it inspires it, it directs it, it frames it, it fills it and that's why I think it's so crucial.

I tried to compare it to growing being a spiritual battle, a spiritual journey and a spiritual war. Think of the old assault. You don't assault enemy citadel and line of battle until you cannonade it. You soften up the target. That is what preaching is – preaching is the cannonade. I'd say there are about ten sermons where that sermon is indelibly printed on my mind where I can give you the outline and almost the entire sermon, but there are also literally thousands of other sermons out there. The fact that I don't remember them, is not a negative. It's just the fact that God kept using all of them. It's like I only remember three or four meals my mother prepared for me but it wasn't just those three or four for it was all of them that she fixed that allowed me to be healthy growing up. That's the way it is with the preaching of God's Word.

It's the cannonade, then in the fellowship, the discipleship and the communion of the saints you get boots on the ground. When the cannonade is over, send in the troops. When the preaching is over send in the small group discipleship, send in one on one mentoring, send in fellowship, send in the communion of the saints. Now it's ready for it's been framed, set-up and softened correctly. I could go on and on with this but let's get to the questions.

Bruce: Near the end of the last Q & A we took on the issue of the compilation of the Bible. The statement we received on this was that you used two terms – literal equivalence and dynamic equivalence – and they would like for you to give further explanation as to what those two terms mean.

Harry: This had to do with people who take seriously Bible translations, they are competent, know their stuff, they are committed and have a high view of Scripture and these are those who do translations so you want to look at their philosophy of interpretation. The philosophy of interpretation always deals with two things. Number one is faithfulness and integrity to the original manuscripts that is what did God say through the Prophets in the Old Testament and the Apostles in the New Testament. The Bible has over 40 plus human authors from different contexts and backgrounds, as God uses their person and their personality but God is the ultimate Author. The first thing you look for in a translation is did they have a high view the Authorship of God and a high commitment to be faithful to every word from His mouth. Matthew 4:4 says *[4] But He (Jesus) answered, "It is written, "‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’"* Obviously, this is a human like way of communicating because God doesn't have a mouth – He has mouthpieces through which He is speaking. It is the Lord who is speaking and I want to be faithful to Him. Jesus said 'not one jot or tittle shall pass away' which goes down to the last little word and last little punctuation.

So the second thing is readability. Now you turn from the author to the audience. It needs to be as readable as possible while maintaining fidelity to every Word and that's the challenge.

Literal equivalent is the term we use when people put their weight on principle number one – being faithful to every word, meaning the literal Hebrew word used and not the Hebrew thought. And not Greek concept but what the actual word that is used and what is the best English word to translate that actual word. The English word in terms of vocabulary is somewhat poverty stricken so it's a little bit of a challenge. That is the challenge we've been running into when using the words Gehenna and hades with both translating to hell, where it's not an inaccurate translation, it's just an incomplete translation.

Dynamic equivalent is the term we use when people want to get the dynamic meaning of the words that they are translating. What is the dynamic impact of it? So that becomes thought for thought. What is the thought that the writer is saying? I believe that once you move from word for word translation – literal equivalence to thought for thought translation – dynamic equivalence, you have immediately moved toward the paraphrase and toward the interpretation. So good translations elevate literal equivalence, then work hard on readability without undermining faithfulness to the original text and the original word.

That's why I would say if we still spoke Elizabethan English, the King James historically is the best in terms of literal equivalent but readability. Then before that I would say the Geneva Bible is one of the best for both of those were excellent translations of literal equivalency and then readability without falling into the trap of dynamic equivalence. Then came the New American Standard that really focused on word for word to almost the exclusion to readability.

Then came a reaction to that called the New International Version (NIV) which acknowledged they were thought for thought and that I think produced many errors. For instance, in the book of Ruth God makes a big theological issue of the land of Moab and the field of Boaz. The field of Boaz becomes a symbolic then technical dynamic to reflect the goodness of God out of the Kingdom of God. The land of Moab becomes a statement of the world and

what it means to live in the world with its ultimate death, famine and destruction. In order for the NIV to be more readable they kind of mix and match field and land and you lose what is in the original of the land of Moab and the field of Boaz. I could give more examples of this. While I appreciate the heart of the NIV translation and three of the translators are good friends of mine, I disagree with some of the thought for thought. I believe it's more a paraphrase than an accurate translation.

It is why I believe the English Standard Version (ESV) is good, because they highlighted the New American Standard (NAS) commitment – word for word – but they worked very hard in readability and you're almost capturing the readable flow of a King James translation. The ESV particularly did an excellent job in the wisdom books of the Bible.

Bruce: The comment the listener made which was somewhat humorous was 'hang in there with all us former Baptist as we had never heard of the intermediate state' so they commented back on the topic of hades.

Harry: It was a Baptist in discipling me that taught me when we die that we don't go to the final state for that state is one of a glorified body and a perfected soul and that state will be in the new heavens and the new earth if you're a believer and that state will be in Gehenna – the lake of fire, a place of everlasting torment – body and soul if you're an unbeliever. In the intermediate state you go to a place of torment as an unbeliever but it is a spiritual state which is recognizable and actual. As a believer you go to a place of blessing, comfort and assurance in heaven – the second heavens – the realm of the departed soul which is the intermediate state for them. This is also called hades, paradise, Abraham's bosom, etc.

I keep saying I'm not going to go back to this but they really are learning questions. So then after being taught by a Baptist on the intermediate state, I went to William Hendriksen who has his background in the Christian Reform church, the Continental Reform church and I found his book very well laid out. So, I'd like to give a resource that I think is laid out in a way that would be helpful and it's done for study. I have had this book for a long time. I highly recommend this book, Bible on the Life Hereafter by William Hendriksen.

Your final state is in a new heavens and a new earth. You're also told in the Bible that it's not just simply a spiritual state, but it's a glorified body and spirit state. Like the body of Jesus after His resurrection. Secondly, you know that when you die, you can't be in the final state because we don't have the new heavens and the new earth and your body is in the grave. So where does your soul go? That's what they're trying to get across to you. Jesus is fully human for He has a true body and a true soul so He died and His body was buried and His soul goes to the realm of the departed souls – the intermediate state – the second heavens, not the part of torment but to the place of blessing. So as I mentioned before the Bible has different names for the same place but it's not different places. If you read II Corinthians 12:1–4, Luke 16 you will see that there are interchangeable.

For instance, you might say 'I'm going over to Pastor and Cindy's house' or you might use the word home or residence or parsonage so here are four terms all referring to the same place, they just give a different sense of perspective by the choice of the term. So using the term Abraham's bosom is a term of comfort. The term paradise could mean returning to a place where there is no sin as it was in the Garden until man's fall. But we will be secured in a final place where there can be no fall and that is we'll be made like Jesus with a resurrected body and a glorified soul as we will be in the new heavens and the new earth.

Where is this intermediate state? It's in heaven and it's what I believe is the second heavens. Spoiler alert – here is where Hendriksen and I disagree. He believes it is in the third heavens and I think there is an argument for that. He says the first heavens is the atmosphere. The second heavens is the universe and the third heavens is the spiritual abode – paradise, but I don't believe that. I think the first heavens is the created heavens and the second heavens is the created spiritual heavens where the angels and the departed souls are. Then the third heavens is the dwelling place of God which you see in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, 5, whereby Paul was caught up to ultimately. But the heavens themselves are called paradise wherever God dwells with His people. This is not Presbyterian or Baptist but this is Bible, trying with the language and information given in Scripture what the intermediate state is. We know it is one of being with the Lord in heavens – where, an intermediate state. It is hades with two realms – one realm for the unbeliever in torment and one realm for the believer in comfort/blessing with the Lord.

Bruce: A question was asked about the eternal subordination of the Son. Give us your view on the eternal submission of the Son to the Father.

Harry: There are those who believe that Jesus for all eternity is a subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit is subordinate to Jesus. The Orthodox, Biblical and Reform position says 'no' to that. When it says in I Corinthians 11:3, [3] *But I want you to understand that **the head of every man is Christ**, the head of a wife is her husband, and **the head of Christ is God***, it is speaking of the Incarnate Son of God, not of the eternal Son of God. In eternity, the three Persons of the Trinity are equal in substance, position and authority.

Submission comes with the willingness of the second Person of the Trinity, the eternally begotten Son of God, to come into this world as the Christ. God is the head of Christ. Christ's submission is in His Incarnation of truly God, truly Man and in His humanity as the Messiah He does the will of the Father.

I understand the arguments of those who disagree with me in the eternal subordination of the Son. I can understand in light of the fact that the Bible says that the Lamb of God was slain before the foundation of the world for when you're speaking of eternity you're not speaking of succession of moments, so I can understand how one would use that in terms of an eternal statement of the work of the Incarnate Christ. But I think when you speak in terms of creation reality what we would say is that Jesus willingly becomes subordinate to the Father as the Christ and therefore He submits Himself to 'not My will be done but Thy will be done.'

Bruce: The next question is, what is your interpretation of the Bible's teaching regarding the images of Christ that make a reference back to the Reformed Confession? When I read this question I immediately went to the time I was able to go on the Reformation trip with you and the unbelievable difference between walking into the old catholic cathedral churches and walking into the old protestant churches. They were so different.

Harry: Right after the Reformation and the iconic, classic controversy where the lay people took matters into their own hands and would go into the gothic cathedrals, tear up the images, and stained glass windows etc. Unfortunately a lot of great art was used that I wish had been tastefully removed into a museum or something, but I understand what their heart was to getting back to worship in which we do not worship by vain imagination. The second commandment says do not make for yourselves any images, which is where this question arises from.

So there have been two schools of thought in the Reformed church on this. One school of thought is no images of Christ should ever be allowed therefore just avoid that completely – never draw a picture of Jesus or put a picture of Jesus in a coloring book. One of the things that backs that up is the Bible very carefully has no descriptions of Jesus, other than you could not look upon Him because of the suffering He endured for us physically. The reason none of that is there is because you're not supposed to focus on who He is physically yet He was a true Man with a true physical body. So others have said because He was a true Man and those people there would have seen Him, it would be fair in matters of instruction, whenever you're doing something visually to represent Jesus.

A number of films early on would never show the actor's face who played the role of Jesus. You would never see Jesus, only the shadows. The movie *Ben-Hur* I think does the same thing. Each country would probably have a tendency to draw Jesus based on people in that country, like an African culture would draw Him African or a Middle Eastern culture would draw Him Middle Eastern. I guess you would be getting closer because He was the Son of Jewish parents. I think that is where you have to avoid that. Jesus wasn't a Celtic, blonde hair, blue-eyed surfer guy.

Jesus wants you to understand who He is from His Word. Hebrews 1:3 says *[3] He (Jesus) is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint (representation) of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power.* Hebrews 1:2 says *[2] but in these last days He (God) has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.* God has finally spoken to us through His Son. How do you see Jesus? It is by faith, from His Word, through His Word in the power of the Spirit.

Now if it was in a worship service where people were bowing to the image then I'd say you can't do that so take that image out of here. I'm going to enter into the discussion in instruction books, coloring books, paintings – is it fair to represent Jesus as a part of the painting without focusing on the features – I would say it's not permissible ever in worship and adoration but if you do it terms of education I'm not going to bring charges against you. I would ask that you be very careful, not to racially, culturally do something that is not appropriate, that is actually misleading for I just think you just need to stay away from that. If you're going to do it then use the shadow or always look from behind and never at the face. If it's in a picture make it distant because you want people to see Jesus by faith from His Word and through His Word. You want people to focus on Jesus who reveals Himself in the Word, not through our creative, even sanctified created imagination. So that's my exhortation on this.

Bruce: I use this as an example with our Briarwood Walk-thru Nativity as we talked about how we would represent different scenes. We have added some scenes and there were some with the adult Jesus in the scene and there was a lot of conversation about it. We tried to do enough of a costume and depiction that one really wouldn't know who it was and I have played that role in some of our Walk-thru Nativities and it's a challenge. I would say have enough stuff where you can tell who it is but the point isn't to tell who it is, it's the role.

Harry: Yes, I remember those conversations and yes Jesus was there in those scenes. There is a good example for no one is bowing down to worship the guy playing Jesus. Everyone knows it's there for instruction and not adoration. Everyone knows it's a representation of something that happened. So can you just focus on the costuming to make sure it's first century and that's what obviously being done. Someone did say 'aren't you concerned someone might start kneeling and

doing all kinds of stuff?’ My response was ‘no, for I had heard in one scene it would be Bruce Stallings and in the other scene it would be my son-in-law so I’m absolutely convinced no one will confuse them with Jesus.’

Bruce: That has never happened in my lifetime where no one has ever confused me with Jesus. That is all we have time for in this Q & A session but I want to encourage you to continue to send your questions to askthepastor@briarwood.org and we’ll look forward to answering them, Lord willing, in our future Q & A time with Harry and Bruce. We’ll keep working through the questions we get week by week so we’ll get to those we haven’t gotten to yet. Grace and peace to you all.