

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Twenty Three

August 30, 2020 • Sunday Evening

The devotional I’m going to start with for this Q & A session comes from the book of James. I’m an unabashed lover of the book of James and the series I’ve done on this book is called the Gospel According to James. One of my favorite parts of James is James 4 where basically James, having laid out the heart issues that have caused us to make sinful choices, now the Gospel not only forgives us of our sins but enables us to make different choices. He then gives us a practical way of how to build our lives so that our default becomes choices that are consistent with the Gospel of grace in Christ. This is found in James 4.

James 4:4–8 says [4] *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* [5] *Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us”?* [6] *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* [7]<sup>7</sup> *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* [8] **Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.** *Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

Here we see that God delights in having a relationship with us and I want to focus on the part of drawing near to God and Him drawing near to you. There is something there that is so glorious but I also want to make sure we don’t misinterpret that yet to fully embrace that. What God does with the Gospel is He establishes a personal relationship with you by removing the barrier of your sin record and your sinful heart. We have a bad record and a bad heart and that’s why we live a bad life. We don’t sin and become sinners for we are born sinners with a sin nature and therefore we sin. Our original sin in Adam is what we are born with and then we actually sin in rebellion against God. The Gospel removes our sin record through the blood of Jesus that paid for all of our sins and gives us a new record that is the perfect righteousness of Christ. So we are on the one hand forgiven of our sins and on the other hand accepted because the perfect righteousness of our Savior that clothes us. Then we’re born again and we have a new heart.

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.* So now we can have a new life and this new life is a relationship with God. The sin problem has been removed in terms of shame, guilt and power and now the sin problem of actual sins is being eradicated by filling up in our relationship with the Lord through what we call the means of grace.

How do you draw near to God? You draw near through preaching, worship – God inhabits the praises of His people, time in His Word personally – a quiet time, time in the Word as a family and then the family under the preaching of the Word and then there is the great blessing of singing the Word, confessing the Word, Sunday school communities and small group Bible studies – all of those are God’s appointed means of grace where you are drawing near to God. As you draw near you sense the actual, personal, subjective dynamic of God drawing near to you.

Now let me set that in context. He is drawing near to you in terms a subjective experience but He is already near to you in terms of position. He dwells within you. The Holy Spirit has been poured out within you but what you are doing when you are drawing near to God

is you're opening it up. For instance, I dwelt in a home and had a relationship with my mom and dad but when I would sit down and ask them questions our relationship became more intimate, more personal and more productive. So now I want to use that human illustration to talk about the bigger truth.

You have a relationship with God. You are His child. Legally you are His. Positionally you are His. He dwells within you by the Holy Spirit. Christ dwells in you by faith but now you actually draw closer to Him as you draw through His appointed means of grace and your intimacy, your depth and breadth of your love for the Lord is enlarged. Here is one other point. You don't draw near to Him and He draws near to you without first He drew near to you. In other words, the reason that you draw near to Him and then experience the intimacy of Him drawing near to you, is He first loved you. He sent His Son to die for you. He sent His Spirit to bring you from death unto life. He indwells you by His Spirit. We love Him because He first loved us.

So while our relationship with the Lord is never initiated by us, we can deepen it in the interpersonal dynamic of drawing near to Him. We have a true personal relationship so that we can draw near and sense His drawing near as we develop an intimate, personal, effective, authentic relationship with the Lord, but all of that is built because He first sought us. He first loved us, He first pursued us through the gift of His Son who would die on the cross for our sins, through the gift of His Spirit who would bring us from death unto life to Him and then His presence within us day by day. So with His Word and His Spirit by the redeeming work of His Son He has already pursued us for there is none who seek God, no not one. We would not draw near to Him and then experience that intimacy with Him if He had first not pursued us and drawn us to Himself. Now that He is within us we now have this desire to be closer to Him and when we do that He affirms it by the intimacy He has with us.

So love the use of the means of grace in your family, your marriage, and in the church so you can draw near to the Lord and that makes you salt and light in this world.

Bruce: Amen! Our first question comes with an explanation with a passage of Scripture from Job 14:11–14 which says [11] *As waters fail from a lake and a river wastes away and dries up, [12] so a man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep. [13] Oh that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! [14] If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my service I would wait, till my renewal should come.* So the question is when Job 14:13 references Sheol is Job talking about paradise which you referenced in your previous sermons?

Harry: Yes, I believe Job is talking about paradise in this passage. Although I don't think Job understands the fullness of all that. We need to understand God's Word is progressively revealing itself but Job is telling us here that death is coming and he knows that is not the end. Job later says in Job 19:25–27, [25] *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. [26] And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, [27] whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!* Job knows that he already anticipates a resurrected body, an eternity and a resurrection.

Yet what Job is dealing with at the moment in the midst of all of his grief and his friends telling him why that is happening in his life, he recognizes he is a sinner and yes he will die. The

wages of sin is death and that means the separation of the soul from the body. What he looks to is the matter of his soul, while his body is in the ground and one day he will be raised – hide my soul. So Job is speaking of that dimension of the intermediate state in hades or Sheol where the believer is kept, assured and comforted in the presence of the Lord yet Job anticipates that it's not the final state for his body is yet going to be raised. That's why the context is very important where he is speaking of the inevitability of death and his request of God's mercy and grace upon his soul even as he awaits the resurrection of the body. The answer to Job's prayer request is found in Jesus who with His atoning death has saved us from our sins and has promised us a new body, a perfected soul and that will enable us to enjoy eternity together with the Lord and one another.

Bruce: The next question comes from a person who had a conversation with a relative and the matter of purgatory came up in relation to paradise, Sheol, etc. So the question is, can you give some explanation as to what they mean by purgatory?

Harry: I want to take on two things here – purgatory and limbo. Those are doctrines developed out to the Middle Ages of the church. The Biblical doctrine of the intermediate state called Sheol in the Old Testament and hades in the New Testament, that predates that way beyond. Purgatory and limbo was something that was invented in the corruption of doctrine in the Roman church and also become something that was very manipulative around the doctrine of penance – what you could do to free people up from those positions – which became very lucrative and that became a foundation for the emotional passion of Martin Luther when he saw how people were being manipulated. Luther pointed out that those doctrines had no place in Scripture for you're saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and you can drop all the coins you want in a coffer for that doesn't spring a soul out.

Now the doctrines of hades and Sheol are Biblical doctrines of the intermediate state. The wages of sin is death – physical, spiritual and eternal death. So when you die your body goes to the ground awaiting the day of resurrection where all will be raised and have to appear before the judgement seat. Your soul will go to hades or Sheol that has two dimensions – one is a place of torment/the abyss for unbelievers, the other is a place of blessing/paradise/Abraham's bosom for believers. It is the intermediate dwelling of God's judgment, not the final judgment, which awaits the second coming of Christ, the judgement seat and the lake of fire. We wouldn't have this intermediate place without sin therefore it is a consequence but for the believer it's not a place of judgment but of assurance. The Lord is with you by the presence of the Spirit of God and remember the infinitude of God for God fills everything. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is at work in your life with assurance in your spiritual existence in that intermediate state – absent from the body present with the Lord. Just like Jesus told the thief on the cross, 'this day you will be with Me in paradise.' Paradise is not the final state for the believer. The final state for the believer is the new heavens and the new earth where we will have a glorified body and soul and be with the Lord forever where there is no sin, no consequences of sin nor even the ability to sin.

Bruce: I remember a while back hearing you preach a sermon and at a certain point in your sermon you were talking about the judgment and then asked the question, 'which of you have not doubted your salvation?' I think there were about three of us who raised their hands but before I take any credit for that I didn't raise it all the way up. You actually said you had doubted your

salvation and this next question goes to that judgment and whether or not you have that assurance of salvation and how you wrestle through your salvation and it comes from a passage in Revelation 3:5 which says *[5] The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.* So the question is, what does it mean when it says ‘I will never blot out his name out of the book of life’? Does it mean you could lose your salvation where your name could be there and could be taken away?

Harry: That passage is actually telling you the opposite, meaning it’s telling you that you won’t lose your salvation – the Lord does not blot out. It is like Simon the magician in the book of Acts where he professed Christ, was baptized, joined the church at Jerusalem and then not long after that Peter tells him his heart is still in the bondage of iniquity. While formally he was identified in the binding and loosening of the apostolic ministry and then time proved that was not true. So in a sense his name was removed but that does not mean it was removed from that life book that Jesus has put in place.

When the judgment day comes there are two sets of books. There are the books of those who don’t know Christ are written and from which they are judged. Secondly there is the book of life and those who are written in that book are saved, because all that they have done has been covered by the blood of Jesus. If your name is there by the electing grace of God then it will never be blotted out. That is why Jesus said ‘Father, all whom You have given Me, I lose not one, but I will raise them up on the last day.’

Bruce: What a great promise we have! I think one of the reasons assurance of salvation is so difficult for us is that it is so amazing that the Gospel is just that incredible, but two we have an Adversary. Satan would want me to read that passage in Revelation and think ‘see there your name can be blotted out.’ Satan is constantly trying to keep us from having assurance of our salvation.

Harry: That passage is actually meant to give you assurance and not if you don’t do good enough God will erase your name. Your salvation is secured by what Jesus has done for you and not anything you will ever do. He is the One who cannot deny Himself so if you are in Christ He cannot deny Himself. In the context of your example, I have doubted my salvation but I don’t doubt my Savior and that’s where my assurance comes from.

I have actually said at times ‘did I really make a commitment to Jesus?’ I John says ‘when’ you have your doubts so doubts will come and so whenever that comes we do what Thomas did. God is greater than your heart so you look to Jesus and when Thomas looked to Jesus he said ‘My Lord and my God.’ That’s it, done! You don’t deal with your doubts by dismissing them. No one is going to be damned because of self-examination and personal doubts. But there will be those who stand at the judgment seat who have sinful presumption. Many will say to the Lord ‘didn’t we do this or that in Your Name’ and He’ll say ‘depart from Me I never knew you.’ So you want to examine yourself to see whether you are of the faith but when you look to Jesus and put your trust in Him, there are no doubts that He is able to save you. You are secure in Christ and there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

Bruce: That tested genuineness of faith is a blessing. It's a hard process to go through but what a blessing for the genuineness is not in me where I'm genuine so therefore I'm saved, no the genuineness is in what Christ did.

Harry: Then He is constantly bearing witness, not by the fact that I'm perfect but by the fact I am purposely focused on Him. He is my Savior. It is not what I do but what I do is for Him, what He did is what saves me.

Bruce: This past week we received an extension of the governor's order through the month of September so there continues to be guidance, orders, directives, restrictions and recommendations, etc. so the question comes back up as this pandemic drags on, how can truths like those found in Romans 13, Titus 3, I Peter 2 guide our actions and reactions toward each other and the guidelines being issued by the health authorities and governmental leaders we submit ourselves to?

Harry: I have tried to be as clear as I can on these but let me come back on this. I can't dismiss these passages that tell me to honor the king and tell me to be submissive to authorities as long as they do not tell me to transgress God's laws. They may be inconvenient or doubt the wisdom behind it or wish they would do something a different way but if the authorities (in our case we elected them and didn't inherit them) are doing their job, staying in their lane of what the government is supposed to do and they give us directions for the general welfare – our king is our Constitution – we are called to submit to them unless they are targeting the church, to persecute the church or the Christian to make you disobey God's Word. Now realize when the next election comes up and you think those in authority are doing a stupid job then don't vote for them.

God's Word doesn't tell me to wear a mask or not to wear a mask therefore I can't make the wearing of mask the issue of civil disobedience in my life. That is what the government has given me direction to do so when I'm out in public I'm going to do it out of obedience to them and love to my neighbor. Now if the government then says to the church that they are going to let everyone else meet but not the church then that's a different story. Now you have targeted and right now King Jesus is not only King over the church but King over the state for there is no authority except by the appointment of the Lord. As long as they are in their lane and do not transgress the Word of God or make me transgress the Word of God then I am going to submit.

I know we're individualist and we love our freedoms and I understand all of that. I understand a lot are smarter than the people trying to make these decisions, but I'm just saying this is what I'm supposed to do. Those very passages you quoted are true in God's Word and I'm going to follow them. I'm also going to follow them if they begin to make laws that are directed at the church.

For instance, I am publically supportive of the elders at Grace Community Church in California, because that governor did not make a general application for that governor decided that church was going to be targeted. So when the government says in a space like this we're not going to let more than 3,000 people then that's their lane which is part of what they do – they are looking out for safety of people in public assemblies. But if they say to churches that they cannot assemble in any building for any time then that's a different story. I think health, fire regulation and all those things are in their prevue as it's generally applied to all people in the state and all institutions but if they then target the church where they let 10,000 walk into this

place but we're not going to let 1,000 walk into that one which is a church and we're not going to let churches meet because we don't like what they do, that's not right.

On my program Today in Perspective I have given the reasons why I support Grace Community Church for if I was in that state it would be a different story, but currently I'm in a state where the governor, not only has stayed in the lane of general application, but has said to the church that we think you're essential and she is going to make sure all our constitutional liberties are affirmed and allowed. I think I now have a greater responsibility to try to affirm someone that is trying to do it right, even as I would have a responsibility of civil disobedience if they had targeted the church as they did in California. So we have an obligation to obey the whole counsel of God asking God for wisdom, even when it's inconvenient or we think we have a better idea. I'm sure when you were growing up you thought you had a lot better ideas than your dad and mom, but you knew you were supposed to honor and obey them unless they tell you to do something in opposition to God's Word. Telling you to do something you don't like is not necessarily in opposition to God's Word. So we need to be careful, thoughtful and bear witness.

One more thing, if and when a governor or one in authority steps over the line I don't think your first move is civil disobedience. I think we need to follow the Apostle Paul, for in his day when the authorities stepped over the line Paul made an appeal. I do know the church out in California made appeals. We ought to make appeals. Now if the appeals fail then we have to draw the line in the sand. We pray, we make the appeal and we seek to be faithful to God's Word.

Bruce: I'd like to give a testimony here on this and this is focused on you. Every time in the last five or six months that the guidelines have changed you have been consistent on what you have just shared all the way through, even to the extent that you have said if the restrictions are such that I have to preach twice, three or five or ten times then I'll preach that many times. Now we're not there yet but you have been consistent with all the different parameters that have come out since then and have worked within them.

Harry: Here we are on Sunday having 1300 people and it's growing. We're having to look at what we'll need to do as we continue to grow but we're not going to disregard the protocols. We'll just add another service if need be. In fact, at one point we were trying to figure out how I could preach ten times when President Trump was saying we might have to only meet with a hundred at a time. That is not an inconvenience for we're willing to do it but as long as they are not targeting the church. If these are general guidelines in light of this pestilence then we need to be faithful. We need to love our neighbor well, honor those in authority unless it causes us to transgress the Word of God. If you don't like or you think you have a better idea then vote someone else in next time but as long as they are not causing us to transgress God's Word we have an obligation to honor those in authority over us.

Bruce: Our next session of Conversations with Harry and Bruce will be a little bit different so why don't you explain how that will be as we wrap up this session.

Harry: In light of having to make modifications our annual Birmingham Conference on Theology and Life will not be done the way we normally do it but we will continue to do it just like we are having to make modifications with our Sunday Lord's Day worship. This year our

Birmingham Conference on Theology and Life is going to focus on marriage, family and parenting. We don't want to do that in a modification because it requires much more attention so we're going to wait until we can do our conference right to be able to handle that subject.

Right now we are in an election year and we have all these fractures in our society so we are going to focus on how we as Christians can do what we have been called to do which is the Great Commission and by doing it (evangelism and discipleship) the church becomes a fountain of redeeming grace in society leading people to Christ and another fountain of common grace effecting public policy that would honor the Lord and deal with issues from a Biblical world view, but stay in our lane as the church. We're not a political party or a civic organization. We are the church of Jesus Christ with a Great Commission to evangelize and disciple Christians who know how to reach up in worship, reach out in evangelism, reach in in love and reach down in discipleship and by doing we turn out great commandment Christians who love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and their neighbor as themselves so they know how to be redeeming grace blessings in society leading people to Christ as lives are changed as well as marriages and families, and public policy to restrain sin in society through common grace.

We have the great blessing from Westminster Seminary of bringing in Dr. Lillback, the president and Dr. Currie, the dean of pastoral theology, and they will speak to that on the Lord's Day morning and through other mechanisms to you and for you. Then they are going to our subject for conversations for our next Q & A session. So this will be our modified version of our annual Birmingham Conference on Theology and Life. We will get to the other questions in the Q & A that follows our next one. Thank you for your patience. We are trying to keep this podcast timely so we can't always get to all the questions submitted but we haven't lost them for we keep checking them off one by one.

Bruce: 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](mailto:askthepastor@briarwood.org) and we'll look forward to answering them, Lord willing, in our future Q & A time of Conversations with Harry and Bruce. May the Lord bless you.