

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”
Part Twenty Eight
October 4, 2020 • Sunday Evening

Currently, this Q&A is in place of our Sunday evening services due to the many ministry opportunities that happen on a typical Sunday night but due to the pandemic we haven't been able to start back up our Sunday evening services. We have heard that people enjoy this Q&A time and would like it to continue even when our Sunday evening services start back up and we're looking into how that might continue.

The devotional for this time is something I've shared before but because of where we currently are I feel it is necessary to share this reminder. It makes me think of what the Apostle Peter says in II Peter 1:12, *[12] Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.* It's not burdensome to remind you of the truth. So this devotional is from Titus 2:11–14 and it is the text I preached from when we entered into this “present distress” and the shut downs that were happening. Since then we have had gradual openings. The reason I used this passage was to give us perspective of how to approach this COVID-19 situation.

Titus 2:11–14 says *[11] For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*

There is actually three perspectives in this text about the grace of God. The past grace that has appeared, bringing salvation, is referring to the Incarnation of Christ and His atoning death, resurrection and ascension. The present grace of the ascended Christ by the Spirit through the Word is that He is discipling, teaching and instructing us to do two negative things. The two negative are to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and then He instructs us to do three positive things which we are to live sensibly, righteously and godly, but you can't put on until you put off. So you have to do what He says negatively because we are sinners saved by grace. So He wants us to mortify ungodliness and worldly desires in order to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age. The third perspective of grace is looking for the blessed hope which is the return of Christ for His people.

I want you to notice something else. This Christ who is returning, who will He bring with Him to eternity? It is those whom He has redeemed from every lawless deed. That is we are saved from our sins. He is right now purifying us where all of this is under the hand of a sovereign God whereby He is showing us sins to kill and showing us a lifestyle to embrace, sensibly, righteously and godly.

I want to give three earmarks and then we'll get to our questions. We want to live with prudence but not panic. The Christian cannot let anxieties and fears dominate them. That does not mean the Christian should not have concerns. We live in a broken world and there is much to be concerned about but we don't let those become anxieties that debilitate or fears that paralyze. Perfect love casts out all fear (I John 4:18). By God's grace we can deal with the issues of life without panic.

The second earmark is to be faithful and not fearful. We don't want fears to paralyze us because that is what Satan tries to do. Satan goes about like a roaring lion (I Peter 5:8). A lion

roars in order to paralyze his prey. We need to have Biblically informed answers to our concerns and Paul says ‘so my concerns for the church.’ He didn’t let those become debilitating anxieties or paralyzing fears but he did address them. So by God’s grace we want to live fearlessly by living faithfully, trusting the Lord. The Bible tells us to be careful how we walk. Careful living is not to be dismissed or ridiculed, but if it turns into paralysis then that’s something else. We are to be careful in the issues of life.

In my older age, we recently went to an area we had been before that had a pretty steep edge but now I don’t get as close to the edge as I used to. I realize that my balance is not where it used to be so we need to be thoughtful.

The third earmark is that we trust God but don’t tempt Him. We are to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age. You haven’t declared your trust of God when you live carelessly in life. You are demonstrating your trust of God when you live boldly and thoughtfully in life. God can give you wisdom from above as to how to live sensibly, righteously and godly. In this age of polarization, pandemic, and political strife our conduct is so crucial – not only what we say but how we live in light of what we say and we want to demonstrate that to the world. I believe when God’s people live sensibly, righteously and godly (prudently without panic, faithful not fearful, trusting God not tempting Him) that will draw people to our Savior because there is no such answer in this world yet we can demonstrate it by the way we live.

Bruce: That is such a helpful reminder and I have leaned back on that many times personally but also passing it along to others to encourage them. I think one of the challenges of that is prudence doesn’t have the same application to each person. So as you embrace that prudence and faith it’s not prescriptive for every single person. What is prudent for one person because of their circumstances may not be for another. So it’s been a challenge to be united in prudence with diverse application.

Harry: Yes we see that today in this pandemic where one may look at someone and think ‘They sure are being hesitant in this pandemic yet be a little more bold.’ There is one lady I know that takes two different medications and has no immune system. When she lives life even in normal situations without a ‘pandemic’ it takes bravery just for her to get out then. Yet it would be fool hardy for her in light of her internal situation not to take extreme prudence in this pandemic but when you look at her one would not know her internal situation and the reasons for her extreme prudence. This is where we have to trust the Lord. We don’t have to live everybody’s life for them. Keep the same principles before everyone and realize that in application it is not the same for everyone. We have to give permission to people to know that we are not assuming that they are fearful just because they are being careful. What they are doing may be an exhibition not of fearfulness but an exhibition of faithfulness in living out thoughtfully God’s Word in their life in the context of their circumstances/situation.

Bruce: I recently spoke with the lady you are referring to and while she is a bit isolated in this present pandemic, she is not uninformed and her prayer life is very active.

Harry: When this lady started listing for me her prayer life journal a day I said “Praise the Lord!” It is amazing the time she is spending in prayer.

Bruce: This past week our governor gave the update on extending the 'safer at home' order which contains the wearing of masks and the intentional practice of social distancing, now is extended to November 8th. And there has been a lot of reaction to that so how would you encourage us in response to that update?

Harry: Let me answer this first with the negative. There are governors out there where as a pastor I'd probably be under \$35,000 in fines and in jail because I think they are out of their lane as they target the church and thereby eviscerating the first amendment – the free practice of religion of which worship is a subset. These governors are even trying to tell the church what elements they can have, but our governor has not done this.

In fact, I believe part of the individuals in our church and our church as a whole have been part of the ability to encourage our governor to not only be thoughtful but to also realize the unalienable rights. I like her language especially when she has said 'I'm going to do this affirming constitutional rights' so she has been very generous concerning the assembling of the saints to get together in worship. She has tried to control our worship etc.

So I feel a responsibility not only to stand against an overreach but to honor those who make an appropriate reach. I think the directives have been in the general welfare of the church. Could I have disagreements? Yes. If I were governor there might be things I would do differently but that may send everyone over the edge with just the thought of me being governor in terms of how a pandemic should be handled. I'm not there and I can't make those decisions. What I have to do, is respond to what is being decided.

I can see why the governor has extended those qualifications because our numbers for COVID have started to go back down, not to the level of some of our surrounding states. Mississippi have removed the mask mandate and Florida too but they are headed in the right direction. It didn't surprise me what the governor did. I was ready for it and we're still under interim ministry worship in anticipation we'll eventually be able to go back to what we did before. People have asked me if I see an end to this and I do see an end. I believe the end is when the numbers get to a certain place yet I don't know what that is. People will show this by their behavior in this pandemic.

Secondly, people are not going to live isolated. God didn't make us to live in isolation so we will be headed back to contact relationships, etc. and I believe the vaccine will be a positive that will move us in that direction. I think there will be some residue left over. There will probably be a lot of sanitizer sold in the future, a lot more hand washing and I think people will be more careful than they have before but I do see an end in sight and I think we need to be ready.

I want to make an appeal on the mask wearing which I do with confidence. Don't let social media and the world give you your worldview. For instance, if someone is wearing a mask that does not necessarily mean they are a political liberal. It may mean they don't have an immune system or they have grandparents at home or many other things. I actually know some liberals who don't wear a mask because they are classic liberals and I don't think you can tell them to wear a mask. Also please don't spiritualize it. Some tend to think those wearing a mask are fearful and that could be the case but more than likely it is not. The flip side to that is when you see someone not wearing a mask and think 'that person doesn't love their neighbor.' Neither of those are worthy of the communion of the saints.

We are to give the judgment of charity. If someone is wearing a mask or not there is probably informed reasons as to why they are doing it. There are multiple use of masks out of

the CDC and the World Health Organization. I have never seen so many directives. Give room for people to work their way through it. Let's love one another well through and let the world see how we care for one another and through that care for the world to show the love of Christ to them.

Bruce: As we follow the guideline for our state, I think it's important to note we're not putting our trust in the mask wearing, social distancing etc. Our trust is in the Lord.

Harry: We trust the Lord because the Lord uses means. People have different convictions. There are some people who will not get within six feet of me and others ten feet and they have some convictions on that. There are some who walk right up to me and I'll have to walk back about three or four feet. People need to learn how to work their way through this as they trust the Lord and make decisions that are prudent.

Bruce: I would have thought that one of the safest places to be during all this would be the White House yet we heard this past week several there have tested positive for COVID, including our president and first lady. So there is just no guarantee. We need to pray for them.

Harry: No one knows exactly how our president got it but because the president and his wife are made in the image of God our compassion goes out to them as we would anyone else who comes under this contagious disease. Would you pray him, those caring for him and whatever profiles of therapies? Here is a second reason. He is not only a person but a president. There are unbelievable tasks and responsibilities that he has on his plate as president. It sounds like he may not have it as severe as others and I hope that is the case and I continue to pray for that but I want to encourage you to pray for him not only personally, but also as president. I know we have an election coming up but he is the president. Pray for other elected leaders who might have this disease as well. I would love to know the protocols, therapies and all for what they are doing for the president because if I ever get COVID-19 I'd like to perhaps have what he had. They do test every day at the White House for it. It sounds like one his close counsels got it and because she goes on a lot of the campaign trails with him that perhaps that could have been the way he contracted it but it is not really known for sure.

Bruce: Speaking of the president, there was the first presidential debate for this upcoming election this past week and predictably the conclusion was that everyone was frustrated. I know you did a recent Today in Perspective program about debates which I would encourage people to listen to, but would you speak about debates in general, not trying to unravel this recent one and how we respond?

Harry: On that Today in Perspective I did do an analogy of what I thought the strategy of the two candidates actually was, but from a Christian world and life view, one I think debates manifest the competing world views in a society. Secondly, debates intensify, clarify and amplify those world views. Thirdly, debates are helpful are helpful instruments. Adams and Jefferson debated, mostly by writing in the third election in our country's history. There was also the famous Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln debates. What somewhat drew me to debates was a civics class where we studied Theodore White's analysis of the Kennedy Nixon debate. Those that listened by radio would say Nixon won that debate hands down. Those that

watched by television would say Kennedy won hands down. Perception is not reality but perception is an element of reality. So those who saw Nixon in his gray suit perspiring while Kennedy was in his black suit, with a calm and youthful look perceived Nixon as nervous, perhaps unprepared. White has done an analysis of presidential debates since then – 1964, 1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980 – and they are really interesting studies.

I love debates. I think they're good but I confess that this most recent one frustrated me somewhat and my biggest reason is that I think I understand what both men were trying to do. My biggest problem right now is that with our present format the moderator becomes a part of the debate and I don't think this should happen. I think the moderator sets up the debate, umpires the debate but doesn't enter into the debate. So my recommendation is pretty simple from a Christian world and life view that I think ideas matter so with that I want to find out where the candidates are based on their ideas.

I would suggest to those in charge of the debate to set up a panel of competent scholars and analysts who know how to look at culture and politics, outline ten prevailing issues and how to word the question, hand it to the moderator, the moderator gives one candidate five questions and the other candidate five questions. When you get your question you have three minutes to respond and the other candidate gets two minutes to respond to your answers. Then it goes back to the one who was asked the question to get one minute to respond to their rebuttal and the other candidate gets 30 seconds to respond to that. Even if you have to mute the microphone you do not allow them to talk over each other. Also both should get an opening statement and closing statement that is only a certain amount of minutes, perhaps two to three minutes.

As a Christian I want to vote informed and there are three issues I want to know – the content of their platform (what they are personally committed to), how they solve issues (their competency of public policies) and then something about the person themselves. That is the way I would approach it.

Bruce: It seems in the turmoil of the debate, the next day when conversations arise about it the candidates fighting arguments become our arguments, so how does a Christian then walk away from a debate and really process what went on?

Harry: If a person just wants to argue then I'd respond by saying 'Hey I'd like to get into a discussion but I'm not going to get into an argument.' The Bible says not to answer a fool according to his folly (Proverbs 26:4-5). But do answer the folly of the fool if you get the opportunity to take captive every thought to the obedience of Christ so I think you need to be properly informed, but I want to put a fence around this.

One of my great concerns is how people are allowing the social media to maneuver them and manipulate them, not inform them. I don't think social media is evil or technology but I do think it can be used for evil. One documentary I watched trying to get my hands around this social media, made an interesting point. There are only two industries out there that I know of whereby they identify their clients as users – the drug industry and social media. In other words, they consider you a user the way a drug dealer would consider an addict. In other words, they are trying to addict you and there's nothing more powerfully chemically, mentally and emotionally than the avenue to your life visually and through audio. They have both of these in social media. They can do things that make you click and as you click they found out what it is

they want to get in front of you that they can make you participate in. You really become a pawn.

So you really need to decide – am I going to let google, twitter, apple, etc. use me (a user) or am I going to use them. If you don't get control of it – how much you watch, what you watch, where you watch – you will be a user. I'm back to my devotional at the beginning where you need to be sensible, righteous and godly. You want to walk carefully in all of these matters. I have parameters as to when I hold my iPhone and when I don't. For instance, I never take my phone into a meeting. I understand the exceptions but by in large you need to set parameters. Our Youth Director has a great talk he gives the youth of our church on this matter.

I think this is part of our problem where we can't have the discussion at the water cooler because of what we imbibe and then we come off the top rope in order to try to dominate someone, instead of discuss the issue with them. Christians have to do better. I think people get motivated by the social media telling them what to believe about other people and how you begin to view other people where they have set your world view more than the Word of God has set your world view.

I'm blessed by the church I pastor at because they work through issues such as these and I'm grateful for that so this is just my analysis and my response to that question.

Bruce: I have been driven in a search for original content due to much of these frustrations and those original documents many times are hard to find. For instance to find a transcript of what that person actually said and in context to what was happening, is really hard sometimes. Many times I find something that has the quotes but the quotes are taken out of context. I think with many things that is very helpful so read from the original source first and then if you still want to read what everyone else thinks about it then go ahead. But more often than not when you read the original source you will find that others are misrepresenting what was originally being said. This has happened with the wear of masks due to the pandemic where I'll hear people's perspectives on the wearing of masks but then ask them if they have read what the governor has said about it only to find out they haven't seen it. The governor is pretty balanced on that. Now what people say about something should drive us to the original content.

Harry: For instance, when our governor speaks don't put our governor in with the other governors. Be wary and be careful and be thoughtful. I agree that whenever you can do primary research on an issue but there are some things I don't have time to do research on. There are certain people out there who do the primary research competently, honestly, with integrity and then give you a distillation. I think it's fair to go to those people so find out who they are. That is what we try to do with our radio program Today in Perspective. My friend, Al Mohler does the same thing with The Briefing. There is another one called Just Thinking through RZIM. This is what I'd encourage you to do. Don't just sit at the end of the conveyor belt of social media taking all that stuff in and either learn how to do the primary research on an issue or know who is doing that does it rightly, trustworthy, with integrity and with clarity.

Bruce: This next question has to do with the Apostles' Creed and the sermons/studies you have been doing on this have been incredibly helpful. It has been a foundation of basics that is easy to pass on to others.

Harry: I'd like to respond to that before you ask me the question. People many times ask me how I feel after I preach a sermon and my response is 'unrepenting.' Sometimes I sense the Lord has blessed but I tend to always feel like I have fallen short on what I need to do for the sake of God's people and to honor God's Word. So that continues in my life but the Apostles' Creed actually is having an impact in people's lives as I get feedback and I am grateful for this. It's actually doing and going beyond why I went to something that is the essentials of the Christian faith, so that has been encouraging for me to see that. You have probably heard the saying 'the preacher gets more blessed than the people' and that's been me in just preparing for each sermon/study of this creed. The preparation to preach this creed has been a blessing to me, in my life, my marriage and family.

Bruce: So this question is concerning the phrase in the Apostles' Creed 'He rose again from the dead;' why do they use the word 'again,' does that mean He had risen a previous time?

Harry: That is a great question. In my study of this creed, the word 'again' does not refer to dead but it refers to life. In other words, He had lived, had died, was buried, His soul went to hades, then He rose *again* which refers back to life and not that He had risen from the dead before (at another time). He rose again from the dead back to life. Jesus has now taken up a true, glorified life that He had laid aside at the cross when He dismissed His Spirit to the Father and to Sheol – paradise – to be with those who had gone before us in Sheol. Now His Spirit rises from Sheol and His body comes out of the tomb, and He rose again, to life. So you would actually finish that phrase 'He rose again from the dead *to life*.'

Bruce: The last question is, you used the word militant as in the church militant in a life takeaway in a sermon a couple of weeks ago, and what did you mean by the use of that word militant?

Harry: In our study of the Apostles' Creed we have looked at the universal catholic church and the word catholic is a transliteration of two Greek words meaning 'according to the whole' which means the church universal. This came about long before there was an organized Roman Catholic Church. The universal holy catholic church is made up of all of the elect of God – past, present and future – from all generations and all nations. It is also invisible. That church will be in heaven and in heaven it is triumphant. While we are guaranteed triumphant while the church is on earth but we are in a battle while we're on the earth which is why the church in heaven is a host but it's not an army. There is no battle in heaven for the battle is done, over, finished. Jesus has won the victory but we're still in the battles. We're battling against sin in our own life, we're helping one another battle against sin, we're battling for the souls of men so the church on earth is militant.

This is why one of the metaphors used in the Bible for the church on earth is called the Army of the Lord. We are in a battle, we have a mission, we have objectives, we have the weapons of the Spirit and the armor of the Lord. Again, this is a battle with an assured victory in triumphant in Christ. Romans 8:37 says [37] *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* Sin, Satan, hell and the grave have been defeated but they have not yet been destroyed so while we are here on earth we are in a battle against these things. When those things are destroyed the church triumphant will be in eternity in the new heavens and new earth. In the meantime, the church on earth is on a mission, on message and in

ministry and we are militant in fighting against sin and fighting for the souls of men and women, for families, the work of the Gospel as we send redeeming grace and live out common grace.

The church militant is on mission – the Great Commission. The church militant develops a culture – the Great Commandment where we love the Lord with all of our heart, soul and mind and our neighbor as ourselves. Then the church militant is salt and light until Jesus comes again. Then we will join the church triumphant in eternity.

Bruce: One of the great calls of the battle we're in and the means to weather that battle, certainly needs prayer so continue to embrace the 70 days of fervent prayer and prioritize that time in prayer for yourself, your marriage and your family. Also, I want to encourage you to continue to send your questions to askthepastor@briarwood.org and Lord willing, we'll look forward to another session with Harry and Bruce to answer them. God bless you.