

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Thirty-three

November 8, 2020 • Sunday Evening

I'd like to start by getting right into our devotional thought. We have just come through a controversial election week and polarization is obvious in our society. Elections have consequence and really are the competing and dominate world views. Elections are the process by which we hire our “public servants.” When an election is over as Christians we have to remind ourselves of a couple of things. One, is that our God is sovereign. He is King and He is King of all kings and no one is in authority except by Him. As you think through this, whether you are rejoicing in a successful candidate or disappointment in your candidate not winning and I understand the depths of our hopes and desires so I'm not dismissing this, but there are some things I'd like you to keep in mind.

One there was a man, who when a teenager was betrayed into slavery, they thought for sure it would be his death. He was then convicted of false accusation of sexual immorality. He was then abandoned by his employer who he had made very successful. When he was sent to prison he made a warden successful who then forgot about him. Through all of it God was preparing him to become the vice president of Egypt. What an amazing thing! That's the providence and sovereignty of God. So remember God is not prevented from accomplishing His purposes if things don't go the way we think they ought to go and God is not assisted in accomplishing His purposes. God has His perfect ways and then we have the opportunity to live responsibly in the political sphere, the public sphere, in the church and in the family.

Here is another illustration. The English Reformation was burgeoning under the teenage king who was a devout believer, Edward VI in England, but he died of tuberculosis at age 15. His half-sister came in and crushed the fledgling English Reformation and was even called Bloody Mary. She was killing Christians with horrific deaths and it looked like the English Reformation was on the retreat. Then she decided she wanted to make sure she had an heir on the throne who would continue to crush this English Reformation so she got married and thought she became pregnant yet it ended up being stomach cancer and she died. The very day she died her arch bishop died, then came to the throne was her half-sister who was a devout believer. Her name was Queen Elizabeth and the English Reformation was catapulted to another whole level for the glory of God and the evangelization of England.

Be reminded that our God is sovereign and His providence is sure. His ways are not our ways and that does not mean we try to match our ways with His ways, even when it comes down to voting for elections. It does mean our hope is in the Lord. So here is a devotional thought. Whenever you respond to moments like this and the disappointments begin to drag us away into despair or paralysis or into withdrawal, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Speak the truth but speak it in love and do not be overcome by evil or return evil with evil but overcome evil with good. Follow Jesus and let your speech always be seasoned with grace.

Bruce: That's a good word. Just in this last week I don't think I could count all the accusations that get thrown and with social media and our interactions with each other it is so easy to grab on to those accusations. How do I process through that? I'm concerned about some stuff that has happened so how do I process that without violating another commandment?

Harry: Exactly, we have a zeal because we see things rooted in God's law and justice that is crucial to the sanctity of life, marriage, gender, family and all those things. Then if we see something we think is fraudulent or deceptive or nefarious it's right for us to be concerned and respond but don't be controlled by half reports or unsubstantiated reports.

It's one of the reasons I'm a Presbyterian. I know it is slow and painful but I think process is so important. When Jesus was asked the question 'Are you really the Savior?' He resorts to a Biblical framework and says 'If you don't believe My works then believe...' and He starts to name the witnesses. Believe the miracles, what I said, the Spirit of God, the signs, wonders and miracles, and the impact of what I have done. In other words, every fact is to be confirmed by two or more witnesses. So don't say something is true without it being substantiated. Anecdotal evidence is not what ought to control us. It may get our attention and need to be explored but it's confirmed evidence that ought to direct us.

That is why I'm grateful for our system of government for our system say there is an executive branch and a legislative branch and if those thing through the election process get out of kilter we have a judicial branch which is where we go to next. So let the process move forward. People want to know if it's alright for there to be complaints and I'd say 'certainly.' There is nothing more important in a constitutional republic that governs by the consent of the people through a democratic process than credible elections.

You always want to be aware of two things in an election – voter fraud and voter suppression. So anything that needs to address it, if it's there, let it be done and bring the cases. It's only the guilty that don't want a case to come to court. It's only the innocent that wants every fact confirmed but the innocent do not slander. Slander is not saying something untrue but is saying something true or you think it's true without substantiation and without process. We don't want to be gossips or slanderers. We don't want to violate the commandment of the Lord to uphold the other commandments.

Bruce: I spent a fair amount of time listening to your In Perspective programs and so I prepared for one of two outcomes in this election. I got my mind and heart right and went to vote. I love voting. I'm not quite as nostalgic as you are but I really do get a warm feeling when I vote.

Harry: Election Day is a highlight for me. Engineers are not as romantic as historians.

Bruce: After I voted, I said 'Lord, I completely trust You with the outcome.' Now, there is this third option – an election that is in limbo – but even that is being debated. Which end is up? So now how do as a Christian respond during this time during this election?

Harry: If your candidate won don't do the trash talking and the taunting. That is so distasteful for me. I hated it when I played sports as well. When I made a tackle I helped the guy up. When you score something you act like you have been in the end zone before. There are some things you need to fix in your mind so there is no taunting and no despair. Jesus is still King of kings and Lord of lords and I'm not saying that fatalistically. I know you need to be responsible and I know you have passions and emotions. I understand that but you have to inform your passions with God's Word. Don't build your Christian life and your joys on your experiences of a moment but on the sure knowledge of the Word of God and the sovereign hand of God.

There were times that the believers during the Reformation were plummeting. They didn't know God was actually setting up the next thing. I don't if God is getting ready to set up

the next great awakening or not. I don't know what He is doing but I'm going to wait and find out.

I did five programs this week on Today in Perspective on responding to the election and its present situation but I feel under no obligation to call Joe Biden President elect and it's not because I'm trying to deny reality. I know we've done that in the past. The media does not decide who the President elect is for it's the electoral process culminating in the vote of the electoral colleges and that's to be done in December. That is when there is an official President elect. So we are in these next few weeks where these legal challenges will go forward and if they prove to be true they need to be adjudicated and if they're not true they need to be dismissed. Then we want a peaceful transition of power. We can't become like a hunta or a coup. Don't return evil for evil. Overcome evil with good. We live in a constitutional republic that the people demonstrated through their votes so we need credible elections, absent voter fraud and suppression and the legal judicial branch is where you make your appeals.

I would also like to say I think Election Day should be a paid holiday where you vote personally with a photo ID and if you can't be there you work out a safe way to do absentee ballots that are approved. I would love to see us get back to that but we're so fascinated with our technology that it invites charges of fraud and suppression or invites the attempt of fraud and suppression. I'm old school. It's a great experience to vote and it's something to celebrate.

Bruce: I think it would be great if every single American could cast a valid vote and then we count them up and see who won. In the recent past you have made reference to the social gospel, so the question is will you compare and contrast the social gospel to the true Gospel?

Harry: I will be saying something controversial on this but it's something I deeply believe. The point I want to make to the church is that we have a narrow mission with a comprehensive message to turn out Christians with a broad mission in life. We won't turn out Christians like that without being faithful to the message and you won't be faithful to the message if you get off mission. If you get off mission you will eventually compromise the message to accomplish the new mission you have given to the church instead of the one Jesus gave which is go and make disciples.

If you think the mission is success in life then you will have a prosperity gospel. If you think the mission is for self-esteem you will come up with a therapy gospel. If you think the mission is cultural transformation then you will come up with a social gospel. In other words, if you think the purpose of the church is to change the culture what will happen is the culture will change your message. You will only do what they applaud and will say what they say you can say.

We already have a statement from the elected candidate telling the church if you don't get on board with the equality act you can't hide behind the first amendment. We will find out who is willing to sacrifice the sanctity of life with this election. My guess is they will be quick to sacrifice the sanctity of marriage and sanctity of sexuality if the government says for you to exist in this culture you have to do it. Cultural transformation actually gets transformed by the culture and their message. I believe the social gospel is the notion that the church exists for social equality with equality being defined not by equal opportunity but by equal distribution.

I believe what we're looking for is not social justice which leads to a social gospel because you begin to use the social justice tools like critical theory, critical law theory, critical race theory and they're not designed to bring a solution. They're designed to bring adversity,

polarization and opposition. They believe that the problem is in the DNA of your skin. We believe racial injustices that the problem is in the DNA of your heart and only the Gospel can change your heart with the message and ministry of reconciliation, first with God and then with one another. Not only is there ethnic injustice but there's economic injustice, but the key is not for the church to take the role of the state or the role of the business world, but the church is to minister to the heart because the heart of every problem is the problem of the heart. The church has the mission and message that deals with the heart.

I think it is absolutely crucial that we as the church stay on the Gospel that sinners get saved and transformed. When they get transformed their lives, relationships and responsibilities get transformed and they become salt of the earth and light of the world. When sinners get turned right side up they start turning the world upside down, but the Apostles didn't go out to turn the world upside down or seek the welfare of the cities as the cities declared their welfare, they sought the welfare of the city according to the city of God and its welfare that they brought to the cities. We are to live here but not be of the world yet we are to be in the world as salt and light and we can't do that without the church staying on mission and on message. That message is a sinner saving Gospel.

Jesus did not die on the cross to take away all poverty for the poor will always be with us (Matthew 26:11). We live in a broken world and some people are poor because of sin or because of sinful oppression. So we want to bring the truth to bear against all of those things and the church's role is to equip Christians who know how to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God, but they can't do that broad mission if the church gets off of its narrow mission with its comprehensive message.

Bruce: I think one of the reasons this approach you have pointed out is so needed is it feels like the social gospel is a bit of a trap, in other words if we could just deal with the social gospel we'd be fine, but one of the challenges to helping people identify the social gospel and how to understand how it is not the Gospel, it's almost like they hate the social gospel more than they love the Gospel. It's like they are more against something more than they are for something. So when someone is wrestling with this how would you counsel them?

Harry: You want to be a positive person about your love for Christ and His Word but there is a time as manifested in Galatians when Paul said to Peter 'you are preaching another gospel' (Galatians 2:11-14). Peter had fallen into the trap of a works salvation and had been influenced by others, therefore Paul had to confront him. We don't exactly what he did one on one but when it came to public preaching Paul confronted Peter and Peter responded, praise the Lord. There we see brothers in the Lord, iron sharpening iron and what needs to be done.

We have to hold onto the whole counsel of God and the Gospel that provides the connecting tissues to every doctrine in the Scripture. It provides the direction and definition of every doctrine in the Scripture – the Christ-centered, God-glorifying, Spirit-empowered message of the Trinitarian Gospel. We can't lose that and we can't even let the good consequences of the Gospel ministry become the new mission of the church because it will then thwart the message itself. I want cultural transformation but I know the best way to get it and ought to happen, is by the Gospel of sinner transformation and salvation to be applied with discipleship within the church. And then sending the people into every sphere of society as the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Bruce: The Paul and Peter situation is a good example because I see many people trying to address a friend or someone they feel is entrapped in the social gospel and it's almost like they would rather declare they are wrong and do away with them as opposed to help them. It seems to me there are a lot of people embracing social issues but not the social gospel, but the way they are embracing the social issues sound like they might be embracing the social gospel, but if you talk to them it's not the case. So how can we be careful about having those conversations?

Harry: You need to make sure they are being discipled so that they don't become susceptible. I do want to deal with this issue of the social justice movement morphing into a social gospel but right now I think the bigger deal is the prosperity gospel that Jesus died on the cross to make everybody healthy, wealthy and wise. This prosperity gospel has been exported from America all over the world. People say to me 'our churches are full' but I don't think Biblical churches are full right now. I think there is a lot of false teaching right now drawing people into something called churches but it is not a Biblical church with a Biblical message, Biblical mission and Biblical ministries. It has become a celebrity show and an entertainment moment. If the Bible is read from the pulpit God can get some people saved there and I'm grateful for that but we have to be faithful to the Great Commission, and develop a culture in the church of the Great Commandment where we love the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind and we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Bruce: A person wrote a question concerning you preaching on mission and on message that says, what should dealing with our countries racial divide look like for a church that is on mission and on message?

Harry: There was another question pertaining to this that said we were too lofty and that I should get more practical and I think I am practical. If I'm teaching people the Word of God then I'm telling there are multiple ethnicities but there is only one race. Everyone you meet no matter their skin color are made in the image of God and we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. Saved or unsaved they are your neighbor, made in the image of God and you're called to deal with them with honor and respect. I don't think I can get more practical than that than to destroy the false Darwinian narrative of 3, 5, or 7 races. I believe that is wrong and until we destroy it Christians are trying to deal with this without going after that root issue. People are probably dismissing me right now as they read this and that's ok. Paul said in the Scripture that we all come from one father that is Adam, we are all in Adam, born in the human race and everyone is made in the image of God. Microevolution has affected our skin colors that have been drawn out from the DNA and that is where that is.

I think some of the greatest prejudices today is economic prejudice, a class prejudice and people are being oppressed with class prejudice. I believe prejudice is not the DNA of the skin but the DNA of the heart. I think I'm being very practical when I expose partiality which is the idolatry of self and the arrogance of self. I think Martin Luther King was passé but I think he was right when he said 'I long for the day when they don't look for the color of the skin but the content of their character.' I have believed that since the day I heard that and I applauded it the day I heard it. I think it's very practical to teach people that.

I feel like the underlying issue to that loftiness is wanting me to come up with a policy administered by the government. The government ought to have justice that's blind in the sense it doesn't give one justice to this demographic or of this ethnicity or that but equal justice across

the board and I'm all for that which must be applied, but I believe all the programs done to undo it is based on the notion of a certain demographic that has been oppressed so the answer becomes oppressing another demographic instead. That is not the answer because then you will have a reverse issue. All that is being done is trying to address oppression with oppression – critical race theory, critical law theory, etc. The policy should be equal justice for everyone under the law, everyone made in the image of God with the inalienable right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I believe the church ought to bring the heat to that and bring the testimony to that. The way we live and function should be the testimony to that because we spread the Gospel seed over the entire field. We don't pick and choose demographics.

That's why I reject the church growth movement because it builds on the homogeneous principle. You can get a big crowd because birds of a feather like to flock together. I wish my parish was more diverse that it is but I want to reach everyone in my parish. I want everyone to step into the church. I can't explain these people. Here is a people who are not a people but they are the people of God and that's what brings them together. They love everyone made in the image of God and they want everyone to be saved by the grace of God. I believe that's practical. I think training up your children that way is practical. I think catechizing that way is practical. I think small group discipleship that addresses that is practical. I think building constructive conversational relationships across economic demographics and socially is extremely practical.

I miss playing ball because we had everyone on the team from all backgrounds. Find as many ways as you can to make those connections.

Bruce: I think the Birmingham Civil Rights Museum is very well done and as I walk through it there is something that jumps out at me and it's their depiction of a timeline that deals with multiple different issues the way I feel like many people now are saying 'let's create a policy, let's legislate something.' This museum shows that they dealt with a lot of issues – voting, segregation, education – and so what you see is issue resolution after issue resolution etc. There are a billion issues. We'll never resolve all those issues with any type of legislation. Now there needs to be some legislation.

Harry: It is justice and equality for all but not addressing inequality by producing inequality.

Bruce: A person is still left with not driving the stake in the ground and the church is still the one left to do it – all men are created in the image of God. My dad was an engineer who was a Christian and he told me two things about racism. One it is unbiblical and two it's illogical. That tells you it comes from your heart and that it's driven by something else.

Harry: I grew up in a segregated area but we would go play ball together and we would go to one another's house but we weren't allowed to go to school together. I also was not allowed to go to the playground where they were. That just doesn't make sense but thankfully people patiently helped me to see that it didn't make sense and then here is how we are to go about it. I have 13 grandchildren and three of them are African American and I don't think of them that way. I just think of them as my grandchildren and that is because I'm trying to look at it from a Biblical world and life view. When you have a Biblical life view then you can have a Biblical life style. Then we need to make sure there are no prejudicial laws in the city, state or government. Equal opportunity, equal justice, here's the law and it's for everyone to be blessed with the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Bruce: The next question comes to us out of an excerpt from Tony Evans book where he is making a reference to some theologians and Christian leaders, assuming this statement that Jonathan Edwards and others were being blinded to racial injustice is true, how could revered Christian leaders like Edwards and others be blind to the injustice of slavery?

Harry: It is because they are sinners and I'm not saying that to dismiss it. I'm astounded at how today we look back with the horror of how could they possibly be sinners? Am I going to do away with all the Psalms of David? David was an adulterer and conspirator to murder. I hate the fact whenever men of God display that we have feet of clay but I also understand that not only is personal sanctification a process but corporate sanctification is a process. We see things from God's Word clearer today than they did in the first century.

The question being asked is built on the notion that the Puritans came over here to build a city on the hill for God and used slave labor. The Puritans had no idea of using slave labor. Most of the slave labor was introduced in the economic colonies such as Jamestown and others. The Puritans were actually coming to escape oppression and the free practice of religion. There did come down the line of descendants where the Puritans were about half and half – half opposed slavery and half that made peace with slavery.

Then you look at all the individual acts. One of the theologians mentioned that he had slaves and he had two. Both of them were learning disabled and they were just going to be cast out into the street. He "bought" them and basically took care of them because that was the only way he could get them. So you have to look at the individual situations but I'm not trying to excuse them, they sinned. Everyone who looks on it in horror need to think what people will think of your life in 150 to 200 years from now. They are going to ask 'How could you live in a society that killed babies.' Or 'how could you live in a society and supporting businesses that are turning out pornography that destroy lives of women, sex trafficking and everything else?'

Right now seemingly the only "unpardonable sin" is racism. It is horrific. I have a talk I do on the seven Presbyterian preachers who could have saved 700,000 lives if they hadn't treated chattel slavery as if it was indentured servitude and misuse the Bible. So I'm with you on that but what do you think people are going to look back at you and the Evangelical church today and our overall silence on the genocidal assault upon the pre-born and now the new born if they survive the abortion they don't get sustained in some of the laws in some of the states. What are they going to say to us funding the surgical mutilation and hormonal and chemical manipulation of children with gender dysphoria? Less than three percent of children have it and 99.5 percent of them get through it with adolescence but now we are told if they come up with we're supposed to fund something that is irreversible and what will they say about us when they look back on that?

Yes, there was some wonderful Evangelical Abolitionists and I thank God for them – Dr. Phineas Gurley, Dr. James Smith – the two pastors who led Abraham Lincoln to Christ. There are others. The ones that you were talking about did own slaves but they also worked to stop the international slave trade. Interestingly, the first state to stop the international slave trade was the state of Georgia. You need to look back with historical accuracy and understand that they were men of their times. The Puritans didn't come over here to build a city on a hill with slave labor. Did they succumb to the introduction of slave labor after they had come? Yes, some did and some didn't. Yes Whitfield owned slaves and I think that's unconscionable. Yes Edwards had some slaves but some were there out of benevolence because they didn't have any other place to

go. John Witherspoon had two slaves at his death and again he took them in because there was no place to go. You need to look at each individual situation.

We have to remember that when we look back we're simply reminded of what Jesus told us – Fix your eyes on Me, don't fix your eyes on them. Learn to deal with people the way Paul dealt with the situation with Philemon. Philemon was a Christian in the town of Colossae, and his slave had run away and crossed paths with Paul in Rome. The runaway slave, Onesimus, had become a Christian after hearing Paul's teaching. The letter is an appeal to Philemon, asking him to extend forgiveness and freedom to Onesimus. He encourages him to welcome Onesimus back, not as a slave, but as a "beloved brother" in Christ. Paul was telling Philemon to set him free because it was the right thing to do.

So we need to examine ourselves right now and realize that those before us were sinners saved by grace. They had some warts and pimples and we are dismayed because of it and rightly so, but yet God also used them even as He did a Moses who was a murderer, even as He did a Paul who was a terrorist, even as He did with David an adulterer and conspirator to murder. That is how we are look at it and deal with it.

Bruce: I have one last question for you and I am going to tell you who asked the question. Sweet Elizabeth Ray asked the question, when do you think we're going to be able to have communion?

Harry: I know all of the staff have worked very hard so that we can have our Christmas outreach and celebrations and use them to reach people and give praise to God during the Advent Season. It will be modified and done safely but we are able to keep pressing on and I'm just grateful for all of you working so hard on this. I'm grateful to pastor a church where we keep pressing on in this manner in a way that honors the carefully but appropriately. This includes communion that is coming up, sweet Elizabeth.

I have had the privilege to pastor now three Olympians and one of them is Elizabeth Ray. She had a para-Olympian career and it was the first year I came to Briarwood. Then she did a DNA test and she tells me that somewhere back in the wood pile that she and I are cousins. I believe her. She is a great girl and she was so grateful to get back to church. She had to wait until it was safe for her. She really wants communion and we have figured out a way to do it, praise the Lord and have the benefits of coming together around the covenant meal. It will take place on November 22, 2020 on Sunday night. In order to participate you will need to register online at <https://briarwood.org/special-events/a-service-of-communion/> so that we can be socially distant. We are going to have a wonderful time of communion and we will also have it on Christmas Eve at our communion service then.

Bruce: That's all the time we have for this session so please 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. May God bless you.