

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Thirty-four

November 15, 2020 • Sunday Evening

We are really enjoying answering your questions about various topics, themes, current events and passages of Scripture. I do miss our Lord’s Day evening services and looking forward to the plans we have in place at the appropriate time to safely resurrect and reinstitute it. We are keep the ‘ask the pastor’ after the evening service starts back up but it will be in a different way so I’m excited about the thoughts around that. Let’s start our time now with a devotional thought.

Recently I preached on the inerrancy, infallibility and sufficiency of the Word of God. II Timothy 3:16–17 says [16] *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* We know it’s inerrant because the Word of God comes from God through those whom He has called – Prophets in the Old Testament and Apostles in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit as Peter says carries them along (II Peter 1:21) so we see the full humanity of the human writers yet the sovereign superintending of the Word of God because of the Author through and behind the authors.

That very promise in God’s Word means that we believe the Word is ‘verbal plenary inspiration’ where verbal represents every word and plenary has to do with the grammar, the syntax and the order of the words. In other words, it’s no accident that in the Bible the fruit of the Spirit begins with love, followed by joy, then peace, etc. Each word was put in a specific order. Jesus confirmed this in Matthew 5:17–18 when He said [17] *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, **not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.**”* This means God’s Word stands all the way down to the smallest Greek letter (iota) and punctuation (dot or tittle) and that all of God’s Word is important. So I want to take this concept and give you a little something more.

This is one of the joys I have as a pastor, to be able to spend hours in God’s Word to expound on a text of Scripture, knowing it’s infallible, inerrant, sufficient and it will accomplish purposes that God sends it out to do and knowing you have to know the Word of God to know the God of the Word to serve Him savingly, effectively, faithfully and fruitfully. I love to even get down to those little words sometimes because the little words are important. I want to give you three passages of Scripture here.

Timothy was told by Paul II Timothy 2:1, [1] *You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* II Peter 3:18a says [18a] *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* Thirdly, Romans 12:1 says [1] *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* I’m using these three verses to emphasize little words that are so important.

We all have a tendency to think we get to heaven based on what we do and the fact is, we don’t. We can get to heaven in spite of what we do. The Bible says our righteousness is like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Even as Christians our lives are like a three egg omelet with one of the eggs being polluted and when this happens the whole omelet is bad. We sin in thought, word and deed and then penetrates and pollutes everything in our life. It doesn’t mean that what we do is not important or that we’re not growing but the Bible keeps reminding us that we don’t grow

for grace, you grow in grace and because of grace. You don't present yourself as a worship statement in life to gain God's grace and mercy, you do so because God has been gracious and merciful to you in Christ Jesus. You're not strong so that God will be gracious. No, you are strong in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Dear Christian I want you to know that you are not where you used to be and you're not where you're going to be. Praise God you are not where you used to be and you're on your way to where He wants you to be and it's not to get grace but it's because of grace. That means when we know we grow because of grace and in grace then we are free to do two things. One is we confess our sins when we falter. You can't ever develop until you're willing to see where you are falling short and because we know we are saved by grace we can be honest about our sins in order to kill them and start pursuing righteousness. Secondly, you know that grace is greater than your sin so you can confidently expect to grow as a believer as we move into life.

What you do counts. Now here is what it doesn't count for – salvation. It does count for your Savior who did what needed to be done for your salvation and now you get to do what you do increasingly more faithful and more fruitful in the journey in your life in grace and it counts forever to the glory of God who by the grace of God has saved you, who now has set you on this trajectory of grace. That means you want to stay in the means of grace. If you want to be strong in grace listen to preaching of the Word of God – prioritize it. Fellowship with God's people. The right use of the sacraments and intercessory protracted prayer before the Lord.

Bruce: Your thoughts remind me of the confidence we can have in Christ and what Philippians 1:6 says; *[6] And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* It is His work and He will bring it to completion.

Currently the election and the ramifications of the election are what is on most people's minds these days and there is much confusion in how to follow how this election is going. There are so many questions right now from a history standpoint so will our election process hold up under this? The second question is what good can come out of all that is being challenged, court cases and debates etc.?

Harry: Will it survive? I'm not a prophet or the son of a prophet but I expect it to because it has in the past for history tells us this. The founding fathers understood the sinfulness of man and all the problems and here we are in a nation that says we're going to be ruled by law. So we are a Constitutional Republic that elects its servants by a democratic process for the executive and legislative branches. That means there is nothing more important than a vibrant church that brings salt and light to the nation but functionally there is nothing more important than a functional, trustworthy electoral process and elections. So if there are questions I think it's good that they are challenged. I don't think you just sweep them under the rug or that they're not big enough because whenever you have problems that aren't big enough and they're not dealt with you can be assured that in the future they'll be big enough and you'll wish you had done something about them when they were smaller. I'm not going to comment on how this election will end but I appreciate you pointing to our Constitution.

Our Constitution anticipated this and there have been significant challenges after Presidential elections where they have made use of the Constitutional means. The elections affect the legislative and executive branches but we have a judicial branch that is non-elected and they are supposed to take the law as they go through a certain process to determine whether the law is being followed. The media does not declare who the President elect is and not even the

reports of the votes declare who it is. The President elect is determined by the Electoral College by those who are sent by the state legislatures on the basis of the vote and how that state handles the vote. Some states when the electoral candidates are sent are divided up according to the vote in the counties but most of them are a winner take all where if you win the state then you get all the electoral votes. That is ultimately when the President elect is declared.

Because we know the results of the election because they have the majority votes and majority electoral votes, we usually let them go ahead and start planning the transition. That is number one. Number two, is when there are challenges they have a mechanism to expedite the state and in the national, all the way to the Supreme Court, where these various cases will be dealt with. My humble opinion, forgetting this election, I think it's good to do this for two reasons. One, people will have much more confidence in the outcome if they know every but legal votes are counted and we have exposed the two big enemies of an election and it's trustworthy and credible in nature. Those two big enemies are voter suppression and voter fraud, where both have to be eradicated.

My personal view is that we ought to have a paid holiday on Election Day and everybody ought to vote in person with an I.D. I think we need to make provisions for mail-in ballots for those who can't get there and they apply for it. I don't think you should mail out mail-in ballots but you can mail out applications to everyone but not the ballot. We ought to count the mail-in ballots first before Election Day and you don't receive any votes after the polls close on Election Day. Then you count until you're through even if you have to pay people overtime to do it but you don't stop counting until it's done and you have observers to those who are counting.

They need to establish the credibility of the election and they need to uncover things like dead people voting or a person double voting or harvest voting. If any of that is uncovered then I think the people would demand a bipartisan task force to establish the criteria for credible elections and then hand it off to the state legislatures. I do not want Congress to control the national vote. I want state legislatures to control the national vote but Congress could put something together along the lines of here are the seven things that must be incorporated in the electoral process within your state.

From a Christian world and life view we need to learn something from this. To those Christians who have a business or work in one, in your family there ought to be process. Everything needs to be confirmed and transparent at some level. So process is crucial and we don't jump the gun. We need process where every fact is confirmed by two or more witnesses. This needs to be put in your family but I'm not saying your family is a democracy but there needs to be process. Every family, business and nation has a culture. Cultures are the values/policies by which you do business. As a Christian this needs to be brought to your family. Your kids know here is how we do business in our family. Here's how we do business in my business. Here's how we do business in our civic organization.

I'm grateful for the unbelievable time our elders and deacons have put in to the process whereby we deal with things as a church. It's not perfect but I'm so grateful for it. I have people who aren't always happy when they share something with me that they think the church should be doing and I think it's a good idea but when I say it would have to go through our process that's when they don't seem to like that. When it goes through the process it will be blessed, owned and improved by the process. The reason we do things well is because we take the time to go through a process. You can't have the benefits without the process. I think this is something you learn as a Christian, in your life, in your family, your business, your civic organization, etc.

We want Biblical processes in the church with theological fidelity because secondly, you have to have integrity. Our integrity is not to be saved but our integrity is to honor our Savior. We want to do things honestly with integrity and wherever possible with as much transparency as possible. You don't want to unnecessarily expose people in an inappropriate way but the process needs to have integrity. That's just a basic world and life view you are learning in this election.

Bruce: I have noticed this year in particular that there is so much contention and yes the election has been part of it, but it seems that any topic these days is going to be argued with fervor and it's very polarizing to see. Now it has been coming for years. For example when you watch a sporting event now all they do is critique and then they argue over that critique for the next six days before they play again. Television shows seem to be designed to be contentious. The news is that way and it seems to just be a debate, if you want to call it news. I certainly don't want to tune in and watch these people argue. It's pretty much what is being forced before us. Now we as Christians are receiving that and you can feel the contention even on the minor issues. Scripture calls us to live at peace with all men as far as it depends upon us (Romans 12:18) so how do we as Christians navigate these waters? Is there hope somewhere for us to have good conversations about things and disagree?

Harry: This is a very thoughtful question. I think there is a lot of contention because people sense there is a lot at stake at the moment that is really related to things that have been building. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito just did a talk that I found highly insightful. It's unusual for sitting Supreme Court judge to make this kind of talk. I'll be doing a Today In Perspective program on this talk but one of the points he made is that COVID-19 is a real deal and people can die from this particularly vulnerable people. He then made the point that some people governmentally take advantage of a moment like this to extend authoritarianism and try to create totalitarianism. People see that and they are concerned about it. We have the pandemic, the election, what it a fraudulent election, did someone take over and manipulate this, etc, because we sense there is a cultural revolution taking place.

I want to speak to Christians here. I'm not saying there aren't big issues at stake – national, local, significant moral issues – but as a Christian we don't respond the way other people do. We are counter cultural. One, these issues outcomes are not our hope. Our hope is in Christ. When I ask Christians do you believe that Jesus is still sovereign no matter the outcome of this election, I will hear the answer yes. Do you believe God can't be thwarted in His purposes and I will hear yes. Do you believe God takes bad things sometimes in a fallen world and will work all things together for His good and I will hear yes. Then I would say, live like that. I'm not asking you to be careless but I am asking you to be a sanctified care less. In other words, it doesn't dominate you or fill you – where you can't wait to get to a computer type thing.

In this day of contention with the pandemic, election, politics, issues of religious liberties, I need to equip you by saying you can live life in a sense free from anxiety, even when you have valid concerns. Philippians 4:6 says *[6] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* You can live and not be anxious about anything. In other words, start living operationally what you will answer me confessionally and what you say to yourself confessionally. If you really believe God is sovereign, ultimately in control, His purposes will be accomplished, will work for the good

and your hope is in Christ then live that way. Don't be so anxious and fearful that you get paralyzed, withdrawn, despair and all these things.

Paul says in II Corinthians 4:8–10, [8] *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; [9] persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; [10] always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.* Paul doesn't know how things will work out but he knows God is working in all these things happening around him. How much time are you spending in front of technology? How much time are you spending in God's Word, worship, preaching, and teaching? I'm not saying don't be informed but be thoughtful and selective on who you listen to, how much are you listening, what are you filling your mind with? What you fill your mind with is what's going to come out.

Jesus says in John 14:27, [27] *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.* When you're at peace you have proportionality. A Christian's bigger issues ought to be evangelism and discipleship which is really what turns the world upside down. That is what happens when sinners get turned right side up and disciplined. We need to know the issues, speak to the issues and I and our church want to equip you to go into every sphere of life but you have to have proportionality and prioritization.

The Bible gives us two things that help us function with proportionality with peace with priorities. One is the passage I just shared in Philippians 4:6 – bring it to the Lord in prayer. Then, leave it with the Lord in prayer. Your heavenly Father knows what is good. Reason with Him passionately, persuasively in what you think is good but ultimately not my will be done but Thy will be done. Secondly, get saturated in God's Word so you think with the mind of Christ as well as live with the heart of Christ in order to know the peace of Christ in your life – the peace with God and the peace of God. Being devoted to prayer and the Word is what needs to be in your life so that we don't manifest contention. Yes, we'll debate, reason and engage in the issues but our life doesn't rise and fall on this. Our life rises in Christ and it can't fall because of Christ therefore in the challenges of this world we participate with proportionality and priority because of prayer and the Word. That will actually make us more persuasive than if we show the frenzy, despair and the chaos of those in the world who do not have the hope of Christ. If you show proportionality and confidence in the Lord you will actually have a greater effect on the issues of our society that are all around us today.

Bruce: Often times the Spirit reminds me to let the peace of God rule your heart and what you are talking about is how we tend to let the circumstances rule our heart. I don't think I always make a conscious decision to do that but when I let that happen I think of what the next verse says after that one in Colossians 3:15–16; [15] *And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] **Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly**, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.* Letting the Word of Christ dwell in you is the solution.

Harry: To add to that the Philippians 4 passage I referred to earlier expounds on that even further. Philippians 4:6–9 says [6] *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace*

of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[8] Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. [9] What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. What is your mind filled with and dwelling on?

Bruce: Here is a mechanism that exists now and this is not like seeing your wife through a screen door, but something I have benefited from tremendously is listening to the Word of God from the ESV app on my phone when I'm out walking or exercising. I also love to listen to the narrative stories associated with the passages as well because the person doing it sounds a lot like Max McLean. It is a way I can let the Word consume me.

Harry: They have an app out now with James Earl Jones narrating who may have the greatest voice that ever existed and when he reads the Gospel narratives it just seems to come alive. When I was a kid I used to listen to the radio program Night Sounds by Bob Pierce who is with the Lord now but it still airs on the Briarwood radio station (88.3 FM). When I was in the ministry I would always go to bed listening to him.

Bruce: There is a question that is related to this that comes to us from the passage in James 1:26 which says *[26] If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.* What does it mean to deceive myself by not bridling my tongue and what is the difference between murmur, gossip and slander?

Harry: This is a great question but I think in the way you have read into this passage you have cause and effect wrong. He is not saying an unbridled tongue deceives the heart but he is saying the unbridled tongue is the evidence of a deceived heart. The whole point in the book of James is that the man speaks from his heart. If the heart is bittersweet then there will be bittersweet water flowing out. I'm not saying if your language and speech is contentious and wrong that it doesn't affect your heart but basically a man speak from the heart. So if this unbridled tongue is the evidence of a deceived heart because when your heart is not deceived then it has truth. If the Word of Truth is dwelling richly within your heart then the mind is effected and the heart and mind then begin to control the tongue, but if you don't then the tongue will begin to control your life.

Follow me carefully. The unbridled tongue is the evidence of a deceived heart and then the unbridled tongue becomes like a rudder of a ship where it directs your life in all kinds of ways. Think of someone who tells a lie and then spends the next three months telling more lies to try to substantiate the first one. It just controls their life. Perhaps when someone says something they shouldn't have said and how that effects the rest of their life or how many times have we not said what we ought to have said so you want your heart filled with the Word of God. The Word of God comes through the means of grace – preaching, fellowship, sacraments, worship, prayer – and as you're filling your heart with God's Word what is in the heart will begin to come out of your mouth. Then the rudder directs the ship of your life on the right journey. The tongue either lights the flames of hell or it exposes the sweetness of heaven and

that depends on where your heart is. The heart of the problem is the problem with the heart, even the tongue so get to the heart of the issue.

Bruce: I remember reading that the Lord hates murmuring and I'm not sure why I had always put that as a lesser of gossip and slander, because it's bad and why would the Lord say He hates murmuring?

Harry: It is so destructive. I think it's onomatopoeia that is the process of creating a word that phonetically imitates, resembles, or suggests the sound that it describes. And this word is what it sounds like in the Hebrew – our murmuring. I think you could make an argument that it put Israel in the wilderness for years. Murmur is like that of a complaint. I think murmuring is the expression of discontent and it's not enough that I'm discontent but I want to make others discontent. It can also be used to disconnect people from each other – make them not trust each other or not even give the judgment of charity to other people.

Being a liar is absolutely destructive but you can tell the truth to the wrong people for the wrong reasons and that's called gossip and slander. Gossip and slander doesn't necessarily mean you are saying something false. It's just you are saying something that you ought not to be saying or you ought not to be saying it to that person or you didn't go through the Biblical process of going to your brother first etc. Slander can also be a half truth. A friend said to me one time that a half truth is a whole lie. It has a purpose to disconnect people and to maneuver people.

Here's our problem though for when someone comes to us and says 'Hey, did you know...' we automatically want to listen. You can always respond to that by saying 'Wait if you're about to tell me about that person, have you gone to them first?' We want to always point people back to three things. One is that communication has a process in the Bible particularly if you are dealing with sin issues. First you go to win them and then you take one or two others with you the next time and then you bring in spiritual mature people in the church and that's the way things are handled. Secondly, you are always wanting to win people not catch people or expose people and the circle of knowledge need only be as wide as the circle of sin. Thirdly, is that the content of your speech should only be truth – speak verifiable truth always in love for the benefit of someone, not to the destruction of someone. That does not mean you don't deal with sin (example – lies), it just means how do you deal with sin (example – lies).

Remember we speak truth in love and we want to give grace to those who hear us. Our communication ought to be a means of grace to the people that listen to us. If we are not a means of grace then our speech is not seasoned by grace like salt and we have become a liability in the lives of those who hear us. We are polluting them. Ephesians 4:29 says [29] *Let no corrupting talk (unwholesome word) come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

Finally, the greatest enemy of gossip and slander is speaking the truth in love. Instead of being someone who pollutes, be someone who edifies. I love Evelyn Christenson's work when she talks about being a balcony person that pulls people up and not a basement person that pulls people down.

Bruce: That's all the time we have for this session. I want to remind you that we have Communion next week and if you would like to participate you need to register at our website at briarwood.org/communion and this will conclude our *70 days of Fervent Prayer*. Take this time

to prepare for that for this will also be a time of thanksgiving as we come together to the Lord's Table. If you cannot participate you can certainly watch it live streamed on our website at briarwood.org at 6pm central time. 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.