

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”
Part Twenty-Nine
October 11, 2020 • Sunday Evening

Currently this is in place of our Sunday evening worship service until we are able to implement proper safety protocols for this time during the present distress we are going through. We have gotten great feedback and are looking into seeing how something like this can continue even after our Sunday evening worship services resumes. This has been a great privilege to be able to do. We start each time off with a devotional from God’s Word so that we’re framing things and basing things in the Scriptures.

I’d like to frame this devotional around what we have currently been studying from the Apostles’ Creed and the text is from Romans 6:23 which says *[23] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Why is the forgiveness of sins so important? It is because sin has a stinger and the stinger is the judgment of God. The judgment of God is seen in death. There are three deaths produced by sin. The word death means separation.

There is a physical death which is the separation of the soul from the body that which was not a part of the creation but is only there because of the fall – the presence of sin authored in Adam. Secondly, there is a spiritual death. Because we are born sinners we are separated from God spiritually. Then thirdly, is eternal death and that is to be separated from the felt presence of God in a place called hell under the judgment of God which includes two dynamics abundantly emphasized in Scripture when we’re warned of hell and the everlasting death. That is outer darkness which means darkest darkness – isolation – and fire which means unending, unendurable torment for all eternity. This is the righteous judgment of God against our sin.

Aren’t you glad we have a Gospel that says you can be forgiven of your sins? You can be emancipated from your sins. You can be set free by the grace of God. Romans 6:23 is a verse we use at Briarwood to train people how to share that Good News with others. When you come to Christ you are forgiven of all of your sins – in thought, word and deed, sins of omission, sins of commission – you want to share that with you family and friends because there is only one way you can escape the judgment of God for your sins. That is to come to the One who took the sting away from your sin which means the removal of God’s judgment because He made an atonement for our sins to come to Jesus.

Here is how we evangelistically use Romans 6:23 which says *[23] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* You can see the division in this verse. On the one side is **the wages** of sin is **death** where I earned wages for my sin – God’s judgement of those three deaths. On the other side, instead of wages, is the **free gift** of God is **eternal life**. Instead of sin there is God. Instead of death there is life. The way you get from wages, sin and death to gift, God and life is through Jesus Christ – He is the Bridge. So we teach one verse evangelism, also known as the Bridge to Life.

Eric Reebals heads up this ministry at our church and is available to come do training to Congregational Communities or you can contact him at (205) 776-5200 for more information. We have a goal that every member at Briarwood be trained in sharing their faith. The mechanisms we make available is this one verse evangelism and the second level is Evangelism Explosion (EE). We would love for you to be trained in these so you know how to do personal evangelism.

Here is my favorite example on this. You get fishing pools when you go fishing for men and my favorite setting to share the Gospel is on a place because I can usually count on some turbulence. I'll even pray for it a little bit, but I don't over pray for it. In our training we teach you about three different ways you can conversationally start this so as soon as the turbulence comes I will say to the person next to me 'Do you think there's a heaven?' and then I'll ask 'How do you get there?' Whatever they say I don't try to help, I just say it back to them. Then I say to them 'I was in the same place. Would you give me five minutes to share with you one verse of the Bible that kind of sums up the main thrust of the Bible, what God wants you to know? I think it's one of the most important verses in the Bible and it contains the most important word in the Bible.' The most important word is 'but' and the most important verse is Romans 6:23.

So in light of Romans 6:23 and in light of the fact we have a way to help train you, your family, your ministry, your small group, your congregational community then just give us a call and we'll be happy to set this up. People don't get to heaven without Jesus. People don't get to Jesus without hearing. You're saved by faith and faith comes by hearing and they need to hear from the Spirit of God through you – your family and friends. We want to help you do that. Hopefully this was an inspirational devotional and a good help for you to be trained in sharing the Gospel. This goes to the core of why Briarwood exists for Briarwood exists to equip Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.

Bruce: I shared the one verse evangelism with a man at a restaurant here in town and I just wrote the little diagram on a little sheet of paper I had grabbed but what I had grabbed was the bill for the meal. So it became an argument between him and our waitress because she said what I wrote the diagram on was the restaurant copy of the bill and he wanted to keep the diagram for himself because I had told him he could have it. So he asks her for another sheet of paper in which she brings him one and then he walks the waitress through the diagram. Now she gets a copy of the bridge diagram for herself and he had just heard it five minutes earlier. He did a great job telling her and he followed back up with her because he goes to that restaurant all the time and they would talk about it. She was a believer and she wanted to use it as well. It's such a simple way to share the Gospel and it's very effective.

Harry: I share the Gospel a lot in restaurants as well and I call it napkin evangelism. I can give you numerous times where waiters and waitresses stop to listen so I get two for one. It's a great training to go through.

Bruce: This first question has to do with the recent study you gave on the phrase 'forgiveness of sins' from the Apostles' Creed. How specific should we be on the confession of our sins – using broad and general categories or try to name every last sin? In a follow up to that one, I feel bad when I keep repeating asking for forgiveness on the same sin, so can you speak to this as well?

Harry: Jesus does not condemn you or chide you for repeated confessions about an individual sin and I will set the context for this in a minute, but He is the one that says to forgive 70 times 7 when your brother comes to you asking for forgiveness for even the same sins of sins my brother has done against me. Certainly God is not saying something that He is not ready to do, but why would he have to come back 70 times 7?

There is one thing required for the forgiveness of sins and that's confession. I John 1:9 says [9] *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Secondly, to confess you have to be convicted of your sins. Thirdly, if you're convicted of your sins you're ready to repent. Biblical repentance is not stop sinning and do better, it's confess your sins and cast all your hope and your life upon Christ. I want to come from my sins to Christ. Now you will start doing better as a way of life as an evidence of having come to Christ but repentance isn't 'oh I sinned I'm going to do better.' It's a 180 degree turn from sin to Christ.

That happens in two ways. We call this justification and sanctification or conversion and the Christian life. When I'm converted I make a general repentance – Lord, I am a sinner – I don't name all my sins. I may name some. In conversion you're confessing two things – one is that you're a sinner (you are responsible for your sins) and secondly is you realize the sinfulness of sin. So you are turning from sin and therefore confessing your sins to put your trust in Christ.

Then our confession speaks of particular sins particularly and that's in our Christian life. I am already converted. I am right with God and God is right within in me by His Spirit but I can grieve the Spirit with my sins. So how do I deal with sins that break the intimacy and the depth and the vitality of my ongoing relationship with Christ? Maybe its sins I'm doing against my wife or my children or secret sins at the computer or whatever. This is what we call sanctification repentance. You name the sin and tell the Lord you want to deal with that particular sin. There are two ways I want to deal with it. I want the Lord to pull the desire from my heart and help me not do it.

We tend to want to do what I call the 'Barney Fife' repentance. On the Andy Griffith Show the preacher says 'what are we going to do about sin' and Barney says 'nip it in the bud' and that's what tend to want to do. We have the power in the Gospel promise to us, not only not to do it, but to go after the desire to do it. In the books of James, Galatians, Matthew Jesus makes this point. For instance, when Jesus is talking about lust the point He makes is if you have lust in your heart you're guilty of adultery. Now is that as heinous as doing the act of adultery? No, but work backwards. If you don't do adultery, then praise God but if you have in your heart the desire to do it then Jesus wants you not to do it for if you do you multiple the heinousness of sin because you have included other people in it, but Jesus wants you to go after the heart desire to do it.

So that is where individual sins are repeatedly confessed. It's not getting saved again. It's 'Lord, I'm back, please forgive me. I know Jesus paid for my sins but I want to confess them before and ask You to give me the ability to get rid of even the desire in my heart. Give me a new desire.' I believe some of the keys to that are accountability groups and nurturing something bigger in your heart than the desire for sin.

Like, when I dealt with the issue from my past life of immorality and out of my love to the Lord and Cindy, my wife, I asked God – If any thought in my mind comes for another woman other than my wife, would You give me a nauseous feeling, make me sick, but God would You nurture within me, out of a love for Christ and love for my wife that there is no room for anything else. That's why the Bible says when you empty the heart of sin through repentance, you need to fill the heart with a new obedience, a new way of life, so the Bible says the old passes away and the new comes.

There are some sins I keep going back to deal with in my life with the Lord for almost 50 years now. Then there are some that God gives me immediate victory over and some a later victory over. I pray to the Lord that I don't get used to certain sins in my life. Recently, I was

dealing with a guy about same sex attraction and I said ‘That heart desire for someone of the same sex is not only unnatural but it’s debilitating even if you don’t act it out.’ So you want to ask God to give you new desires in your life and as long as you need to keep at it then keep at it because the Lord is working through a process. Remember that the desire has a terrible effect in your life as well as the act itself. So you really need to go after the desire.

One of the ways to go after the desire is through accountability so you don’t act it out and the other thing is to build in new desires in your life that flush the old desires out. That is why when Jesus talks about a demon that is cast out, if you don’t fill the heart then it comes back seven times worse (Matthew 12:43–45).

Bruce: Evangelistically, when we are talking to someone about sin many times in their religion they have a different definition of sin, so what would be a good Biblical definition of sin to help them understand what sin is?

Harry: I’d like to first say to take time in your devotions with your family to go through the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Sin is the transgression of or want of conformity unto the Law of God in thought, word or deed. There are sins of omission and commission. When God says not to commit murder, He is also telling you to commit life. The sin of omission here is if you don’t commit life. The sin of commission here is when you do the act of killing. If you bear false witness and lie that is a sin of commission and the sin of omission would be to not tell the truth. Then we need to deal with this in thought, word and deed. Sin is not making bad mistakes or getting out of accord with the flow of life.

There are three words in the Bible translated sin. One translation of sin means to miss the mark. The other we translate transgression which means you have stepped over the line of God’s revealed will, His commands, His Word, His imperatives in the Bible and the other translation is crookedness in thought, word and deed where in thought, word and deed your life is crooked instead of on the path of God’s revealed will. David in Psalm 32 deals with all three of these translations of sins. He talks about dealing with his sin, eradicating the transgression and covering his wickedness.

God in Jesus forgives and it’s only in Jesus which is why evangelism is so important. You don’t get saved by doing better because you never will do better, you just won’t be as evil yet even our righteousness is like filthy rags. So sin in its revelation is there to bring you to confession to Christ for forgiveness of sins. He will always forgive those who come with true confessions of their sin – the reality of it, the sinfulness of it and the responsibility of it. He is faithful and just – it’s not that He’ll give you another chance, He paid for that sin therefore you are forgiven of it. Now, go and sin no more. So what happens when you sin again? You come back but it’s not to get saved, for this is to keep growing by putting off the old man through confession and repentance and putting on the new man with obedience.

Bruce: We have a question about the communion of saints from the Apostles’ Creed. After preaching about the church universal, why all the denominations and where did they all come from? Doesn’t that reflect division of the universal church that is on this earth?

Harry: This is a great question and it’s particularly highlighted when you go to the high priestly prayer of Jesus which is the Lord’s prayer for His people and it has seven requests. This high

priestly prayer of Jesus is found in John 17. One of the central requests is unity. Jesus says ‘that they may be one as we are one, Father’ (John 17:21). We are in a world that is broken.

Follow me on this. Do I want to help people escape poverty? Yes. Will we have a utopia with no poverty before Jesus comes? No, because sin won’t be eradicated and poverty, discouragement, despair and the breaking of God’s law will never disappear until Jesus brings us to a new heavens and a new earth. You can have forgiveness, be emancipated from sin, grow and we can see sin diminished through redeeming grace and common grace but we’ll never see it disappear.

Paul was saddened to hear there were divisions at Corinth in the church. I Corinthians 11:18–19 says *[18] For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, [19] for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.* Paul is saying he wants unity but he realizes on this side of eternity there are going to be divisions and they are bad in one sense and good in another sense.

Unity is the work of the fruit of the Spirit so we are led by the Spirit. The Spirit always works with truth so you have the unity of the Spirit maintained by love in the bond of truth. If a church or individuals walk away from the truth that will break unity. So there are times that a local church has to separate from a church that has embraced abandonment of the truth of God’s Word. The Bible says we are built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. The Bible says we’re the bulwark and pillar of truth – we’re built on truth and built to uphold truth. So if a church departs from the truth I can’t stay in unity with it. Now you have to have wisdom.

We’re not talking about issues of necessarily church government or secondary or tertiary issues. We’re talking about primary issues. So if a church abandons that God’s Word is true, infallible, reliable and inerrant then I can’t stay in that church. That is why the PCA came into existence in 1972. They changed the confession from the Bible is the Word of God to the Bible contains the Word of God and that puts the church over the Word instead of built on the Word, under the Word and there to proclaim the Word. Or if the church says they don’t believe in sharing the Gospel, then what do we exist for? We are to do the Great Commission. Or if the church says they don’t believe the culture of their church should be the Great Commandment for those are crucial issues. Therefore there will be divisions because people will abandon the truth through false teachers and the influence of false teachings. So it has to happen.

Secondly, geographically we can’t all be one. So when Jesus says He wants us to all be one, should that be reflected in the culture of the local church and its connection to other churches of like faith, those who also have our confession? Yes, those are ones I’d like to work with. Here is how we try and work it out at Briarwood. For those who agree with the Westminster Confession of faith, we want to organizationally be one, but if we don’t agree on those doctrines we can’t functionally be one. So we want to be one with those churches of like precious faith. The Bible says ‘those things most surely believed among us’ that we hold those common confession but there are some who don’t agree with us on church government or mode of baptism, yet they agree with us on the primary doctrines. So we can work together in unity in an evangelistic crusade, sanctity of life, sanctity of marriage, etc.

Our ministry that came from Briarwood called Lifeline, we now work with conservative, faithful Episcopalians, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists who are in the ministry with us and that is one of the values of parachurch ministries. It allows those of us with differences that would keep us from being organizationally in the same denomination but in the primary doctrines we’re in agreement. For instance, there were two or three efforts at National Prayer that we supported

and those we are in agreement with on the foundational issues of the Apostolic Creed. So there are people I can work with on an Apostles' Creed basis, then 201 Evangelical Christianity and then 301 the Westminster standards.

Divisions are bad because they wouldn't be here without sin and abandonment of truth but because there is sin and abandonment of truth, divisions will be necessary at times and in order to stand approved in the truth and out of your commitment to the truth. You can only walk together as you are agreed. How can two walk together unless they agree (Amos 3:3). We can have organizational unity with those we are in agreement with and we can have functional unity with those in parachurch organizations that we are not in total agreement with but yet do agree on primary issues.

Bruce: You mentioned in your answer that there is not going to be a utopia until Christ comes back and yet there is a growing movement to make a mission of the church to try to create a utopia specifically with one of the topics being social justice – motto being let's make our country a better place until Christ comes back – and as you have said before, if that becomes the mission then it will change the message. We're already seeing now that it's not just the social justice endeavors, many of which are valid, but it's beyond that where now it becomes the social justice gospel which changes the message.

Harry: This is very important. I don't argue about terms but I don't use the term social justice. I use the term Biblical justice. Where do people get an understanding and training of Biblical justice? That is one of the goals of discipleship. Micah 6:8 says *[8] He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* Social justice divides by Marxist tools like critical race theory, critical law theory but it's how do I do justice with the categories, principles and values in the Bible? In order to do Biblical justice you have to disciple people.

I was disciplined through the patient discipleship of others. God allowed me to deal with the issue of ethnic prejudice. CRT (critical law theory) roots the sin of racism in someone's skin color. The Bible roots the sin of racism in someone's heart so it doesn't matter what color you are, you can be a racist, ethno-centered, partial. Those are not skin color issues, it's a heart issue. I'm not going to go to a tool that originates with the wrong categories, values and directions. So CRT is out the window for me. The Biblical view that there is a human race, with ethnicities and we because of our sinful heart will do prejudices and partiality, God says go after the heart of it and not whitewash the tomb. The Bible tells me where the problem is – the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. The heart of the problem is not in your DNA, the body, but the heart of the problem is in the DNA of your soul.

This is why the church has to stay on mission, on message and in ministry, because when we disciple people we start with the Gospel and then we take the Gospel to its implications. Jesus says in Matthew 28:19–20, *[19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* In discipleship, my job, as in the church, is to disciple people with a broad mission found in I Corinthians 10:31 which says *[31] So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* As a Christian this makes you salt and light.

Yes, we will never get to a utopia but we will salt sin, for it can be restrained. We can see cultures change, not because the church exists to change the culture, but because the church

exists to change sinners with the Gospel message in evangelism and discipleship. When sinners change their lives change – marriage, families, neighborhoods, communities. Will we ever get to a utopia here? No, I'm not a post-millennialist, can we see things grow? Yes, but if the church decides its mission is cultural transformation, it will never happen. If the church decides to stay on mission and on message with its narrow mission it will produce Christians who are salt and light, who know how to do justice, love kindness (mercy) and walk humbly with God, because the Bible has defined justice for them, not some Marxist tool that was designed to create opposition, adversity, division and chaos so that the messiah of the state can step in and save you. We use Biblical categories, precepts and principles to go after it so that sin becomes unthinkable and therefore undoable because of the Gospel message you can be forgiven and changed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Bruce: In our last few minutes and in light of what you just shared, tell us how important it is to be a part of our upcoming National Ministries Conference.

Harry: We are having to modify our upcoming conference due to the pandemic we are in but the church is not going to quit being the church. I lost my next door neighbor to this COVID-19 pandemic, but praise the Lord a week before they had contracted the disease we had a wonderful conversation about the Lord and his trust in the Lord. We will continue to do what the church is supposed to do taking safety measures during this pandemic. We believe this conference is very important because we want to see this produced in ministries throughout our nation because we need a national Gospel awakening. Gospel awakening comes through God's people who are saved and gathered into faithful, vital, right-thinking, right-living churches – not perfect but focused upon Christ, preaching, prayer, evangelism, discipleship and committed to being faithful to the inerrant Word of God, fulfilling the Great Commission by the means that God has appointed as they are true to the reformed faith. Reformed faith is the faith that says Scripture alone is the only rule of faith and practice. When churches are living that way they then produce disciples by God's grace who are able to be salt and light in the world. We want to multiply those churches. At this conference you will hear from some of those churches where we at Briarwood are participating with that we are planting in our region, the state of Alabama and in our nation. World Missions is another thing.

All of you who are concerned about our nation and I know you're engaged in the political world and rightly so, this is even more important. King Jesus has His church and the more we multiply Gospel healthy churches through church planting, church revitalization and through effective parachurch ministries that are truly centered on the Word of God, the Gospel and the Great Commission under the authority and ministry of churches, the better we are. That is what our mission's committee has put together. You can meet some of them electronically with meetings that we will be having via technology. We have a wonderful speaker who I have had the opportunity to partner with in church planting and who has also planted a church in our denomination. Tom Hawks is going to be our main speaker and it will be absolutely encouraging and wonderful. You can find our schedule listed on our website at briarwood.org/nmc. Please take advantage of being a part of this National Ministries Conference. This is the most important thing we can be doing, other than just being faithful right here where we are, which is to reproduce ourselves nationally with churches and ministries that are committed to fulfilling the Great Commission, being true to the reformed faith and absolutely committed to the inerrant and infallible Word of God. I am so excited about it and I want you to

be excited about it but I also want you to be informed because I know when you find out what's happening that will be inspirational. This is where the vast majority of our tithes and offerings go at Briarwood, to the work of the Gospel in our nation and then through our World Missions faith promise around the world.

Bruce: 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 with a special edition next week with Tom Hawk, our National Ministries Conference speaker. God bless you.