

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Thirty-one

October 25, 2020 • Sunday Evening

Please keep sending your questions about anything but before us is an election. I always attempt to outline how Christians from a Christian world and life view vote, both the right and the privilege of voting in our country, in our setting in the context of our government before a presidential election every four years. So this Q & A session will be devoted to that and we'll pick up the regular Q & A in our next session.

Devotionally, I'd like for you to think about three passages of Scripture – our Lord's words in the Gospels, Peter's words in I Peter and Paul's words led by the Spirit of God in Romans 13. We are told to honor those in authority over us unless they cause us to transgress the law of God and we are to submit to them. Secondly, we are told to pray for those in authority over us in I Timothy 2 and we are told by Jesus in Mark 12:17, [17] *“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”* And they marveled at him. We are told by Paul in Romans 13:7, [7] *Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.* Peter says in I Peter 2:17, [17] *Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor (king).*

In the United States the president is not the king, not a senator, not a Supreme Court justice for the king is Lex Rex – the law is king in the United States. All elected officials, all appointed officials and all civil servants take their vow to the Constitution of the United States – the law of the land. We are a federal republic that is arranged around a Constitution, more rightly called a Constitutional Republic that is a nation of laws. But in it we have a democratic process to elect those who legislate which is the Legislative branch, those who execute the law (the Executive Branch), and then those who make judgments which is the Judicial Branch of the law of the government.

We are currently in an election process and our Lord tells us to participate. According to our Caesar, the Constitution is our responsibility, privilege and opportunity to vote for those who are going to be put in the elected offices in our land. During this time, I would like for you to think about how you can participate and render under the Constitution your appropriate responsibilities as a citizen, governed by my ultimate allegiance to King Jesus, the sovereignty of God as revealed in His Word and as the Spirit of God leads you. In this session we will look at what I call channel markers in how we approach deciding on our vote and election that is just now only days away.

Bruce: I still use the 2012 and 2016 sermons you did on elections to guide me through these election seasons which are very difficult. We don't want to communicate to people that this is an easy process for this is a hard thing to navigate especially when everyone is trying to tell you what to think and believe everywhere.

Harry: It is very common right now that a Christian can't vote this way or that way and one has to think is this true? I never say that a Christian can't vote for and then put a party in. The reason why is that I prefer the word should – Should the Christian vote for this or vote for that. The word can is a word of ability. A Christian should not sin but they can. So Christians can

support a wrong platform or a wrong party for various reasons but the question we're trying to get at is, what should a Christian do from a Biblical world and life view under the eye of God.

Bruce: There are two observations I would make each time when voting having heard you do this now for the past 20 years. One is that you always go to the issues at hand. Somehow you are able to filter and pull out the key issues for each person running in the election and you speak much more about the issues at hand than you do about the candidate. Somewhere connected to that with you being a pastor you don't endorse a candidate. So can you speak to that because often times I hear people after they hear you on issues say, 'He didn't tell us who to vote for.'

Harry: That is one of the reasons why I don't say who to vote for. There are a couple of things to me that are very important about elections. Number one, an election highlights the two competing dominant world views in a society. This election probably more than any other one that I've participated in, is highlighting the two dominant competing world views at work in the public square. Secondly, elections have consequences. I want you to own the consequences with your votes not later where someone says 'I just voted the way Harry said.' Thirdly, I believe elections intensify, amplify and clarify the world views that are work.

That's why I think a moment like this is an important opportunity for me as a pastor to do discipleship – helping Christians learn to think the importance of this in a Christian world and life view and how to navigate it from a Christian world and life view which will affect the other areas of their life as well. I will evaluate party platforms and deal with issues but I will not endorse candidates. I try to approach this as a functional independent making an evaluation.

I believe I have every right to endorse a candidate even as a pastor and to even announce it from this pulpit but I don't. The reason why is one, I don't want to lose this as a discipleship opportunity so that people learn to think Biblically and prayerfully come to a decision that they own that's hopefully a right decision. Secondly, if I take a position I automatically carry everybody else in the church. In some election no one would really care but in many elections there are competing dynamics that are taking place. People will tend to say 'Briarwood, because Harry does...' and I don't think that's fair to our congregation for me to act on their behalf and everyone gets carried with that act. Thirdly, I don't want people to get lazy. I appreciate the confidence one might have in my decision and the esteem that comes with that but I want others to work their way through the issues and not go just go with what I say. Because what people do in making this decision will affect other decisions in your life and how you process those.

Bruce: The fact that you deal with issues and not candidates that goes to every member so that passes on but the second part where you don't feel led to endorse a candidate that not so much. In other words, you're not suggesting that members of the church shouldn't endorse or support a candidate.

Harry: That is correct. Because I'm the senior pastor at Briarwood if I endorse a candidate then it becomes Briarwood endorsing that candidate and I don't think that's fair. If everyone waits to do what I do then they never really grow through the process and can become lazy in their decision making. Even after doing this session I'm sure I will get an email from someone still asking me who I'm going to vote for and I understand that.

In General Assembly before I came to Briarwood and pastor at Christ Covenant, I used to sit in hind sight of Frank Barker just to see where he was going to vote, but I finally realized I

needed to get in there and make my own decisions. Frank is a help for me making my decisions but I can't make Frank my decision maker. That is what I want all of our members to do for themselves as I share the way I make my decisions.

Bruce: There is such a contrast of platforms and people. It's not like there is a fine line of discrepancy here. To take on the issues, is what will navigate someone through this.

Harry: When I said competing dominant world views, there is really a clear choice in this election.

Bruce: So what are these competing world views that are at play here?

Harry: I think the competing world views are basically this; do we have a limited government that protects God-given liberties so that with justice everyone has an equal opportunity? Do we repent of where we haven't done that and keep maturing that? I love that we are a nation of law but God help us mend our every flaw. So there are flaws in this American experiment but as I look at it from a Biblical world and life view I don't know any other that I would want to be a part of and usually it's not in the Constitution that is the problem, it's been in the implementation and interpretation of the Constitution plus the executions and judgments that have been made from the Constitution that were wrongly done at various times.

I believe we're in a good system of limited government that protects God-given liberties, ruled by law. The executive office executes, the judicial makes judgments based upon the law and legislation is the one that adds to the laws of the Constitution consistent with the Constitution as determined by the judicial branch and then executed by the office. The desire is for equality of justice and equality of opportunity.

The competing world view says 'no' the Constitution is not a document that sets the standard, it's a living document that we can now read into it what we want to read into it. Secondly, the judicial branch can be turned into another political branch where you pack the court with black robed legislators that are judicial activism, reading into the Constitution, instead of umpires using the Constitution.

For me, the Constitution is like the 17 and a half inch home plate. When I was putting my wife through college I was umpiring and I had to decide whether it was a strike or a ball as that ball came over home plate. I didn't get a chance to make up what I wanted to, like whether I wanted a 20 inch home plate today or not. Umpires are arbiters, they are a judge. My grandfather used to say when asked 'is that a strike or a ball' that 'it ain't nothin' till I call it.' But you call it by a standard. I think that's all at stake right now.

Are we going to be a constitutional republic or the competing world view is, not equal opportunity but equal distribution? It's not the free market governed by law and charity whereby distribution takes place, it is the government who determines who can have what liberties in order to have equal distribution as determined by the government, which is another word for socialism. This is a pretty big move toward socialism in the area of medicine, the court, the executive branch and even the packing of the senate by adding states that will be a sure vote in certain areas. I think it's very clear about the competing world views that are there.

Bruce: In about ten days we'll be casting votes one way or the other, so how does a Christian approach this with a desire to honor the Lord in their vote?

Harry: It's the same thing as 2012 and 2016, but every year I try to change it up a little bit because I think I'm maturing myself in how I understand it and articulate it. First I'll give the basic foundational three points around the letter 'p'.

The first one is to pray. This is not something ritual where you are supposed to pray a certain way or say a certain thing. You have to really pray about the next two 'p's' so you're not motivated out of fear or panic, you understand the sovereignty of God no matter the outcome, your trust is in the Lord no matter who is put in as president and then prayerfully ask for wisdom.

The second 'p' is participation. As we go through this I hear people say 'I'm not going to participate' and basically you just did for you participate by not participating. I'm not going to tell you what candidate to vote for, not to vote for or who to write in. That is between you and the Lord and the moral decisions you need to make. I do think if you decide not to vote you give up the right to criticize in the future. I lean toward thoughtful participation and basically we are a two party system in the US. Our Constitution provides you the opportunity to vote and as Jesus said 'render to Caesar what is Caesar's' I think you should take that opportunity.

The third 'p' is to prepare. I think you need to do intense prayerful preparation so that your vote is not controlled on the pundits of social media or cable news channels. I don't know where you're going for your information but you must personally pursue information. I always encourage you to do as much primary research as you can or pick people whom you really can trust. I have about five people that I listen to so recently when the debate took place I wanted to hear what those five people said about the debate after I made my own evaluations. You still want to be careful about that, but do your preparation in this area.

What is the focus of your preparation? Now I want to go to the functional three points.

Bruce: Before you go to those functional points, who are some of the five you listen to? I know some are dying to know. There are so many people claiming to be experts on this election so who are the ones you go to, not that you give them cart blanche, but those you trust?

Harry: One of them is Al Mohler. I think Al has great insights. I'm not saying he is perfect but I use him after I've done my own personal work. There is a man who used to be in the Bush administration named Ari Fleischer who I listen to and I have a great deal of respect for him. I think his insights are very thoughtful. There is another man on Fox News named Brit Hume, who is actually retired now but I have found he give pretty thoughtful insight as well. There is another man named Rod Dreher who is a journalist who I like to listen but I don't always agree with him. I don't take everything he says but he has interesting things to say. Those are some I listen to but not all that I take into consideration.

Bruce: So many times people can get caught up in the headlines or literally even the first bold phrase of something written where it's someone's view of that world event. Now, I want to see the transcripts and there are places you can get transcripts. So now you want to give us the three functional points.

Harry: Yes, these are the three 'c's' of the functional points. The Bible teaches three 'c's' about leaders – character, content and competency. Character – who are they? Content – what are they committed to doing? Competency – are they able to do it? I think these three are absolutely important and they can be found in the book of Hebrews 13. Hebrews 13:7 says [7] *Remember*

your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. ‘Remember your leaders’ where leading is a competency. ‘Who spoke the Word of God to you’ where you can’t tell people what you don’t know, you have to have content. ‘Considering the outcome of their life imitate their faith’ where you look at their character and conduct in life.

I believe in what is known as sphere sovereignty where God has established three spheres that are sovereign but interdependent – the state, the family, the church. Each one of them have leadership and each one of those leaders I evaluate on character, conduct, and competency, but I don’t have the same order in each of them. As I study the Bible concerning leaders in the church it is abundantly clear in the 17 qualifications that 15 of them deal with character and conduct, only two deal with competencies. They have to know what they are doing. In the church I look at character, content and competencies, in that order. In the family, I look at that basic same order but in the state I don’t have the same order, particularly in a constitutional republic. In the state, my order is content, competencies and character. I could argue for content, character and competencies and be willing to do that.

The reason I don’t put character first when it comes to the state is because we have three branches of accountability but notice character is still there. In a state and particularly in an executive office what they do will ultimately be held accountable by the legislature and the judicial branch. The accountability that is there helps us on the character issue. So in the matter of the state I first want to know content and what they are going to do. Then I look at competency to see if they are able to do it and then character where I look to see if they have conviction in their personal life of what they are doing and what they are committed to. Character is crucial but I first look at content in this matter.

When I look at content regarding the state, I look at two things. One, is what their party platform is for their party elected them to carry that standard. Secondly, I want to know their personal agenda, their personal platform, and what they are committed to do. Some are hard to know because they tend to change their positions but that tells you that their platform is them. Their agenda is whatever I need to change to get into power I’ll change. That’s a platform and it’s also a character issue.

This is very simple for me, for when I take a look at a party platform of someone who is going in I take a look at God’s law. I evaluate that platform and their personal agenda by God’s law. The first four commandments are dealing with the love to God and worship – personal worship and gathered worship. So when I look at their platform, I ask ‘will the platform that they represent promote the free practice of religion?’ I do not believe the state tells me how to worship but the state has policies that protect the freedom of worship and that freedom of worship is governed by the four principles of the first four commandments.

Basically the first four commandments are [3] *You shall have no other gods before Me.* [4] *You shall not make for yourself a carved (graven) image...* [7] *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.* [8] *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.* (Exodus 20) I don’t expect them to legislate that but I do expect them to protect the free practice of religion. When I take a look at the platforms of those running in this election it is abundantly clear where I’m going to fall on that one.

Then God’s law goes to honor your father and mother, so do they protect the sanctity of marriage (one man one woman for life) and of family (upholding the responsibility that parents have over their children or does it assume that the state knows better than the parents) as foundational to a culture? Then I move to ‘you shall not commit murder’ so does their platform

uphold the sanctity of life (preborn life, immediately born life, post born life and then life at the end of life) in the realm of what a government does? The government does not do the work of the individual Christian or individual citizen or the work of the church. This would also go directly to the sanctity of sexuality and sanctity of marriage under God's law of not committing adultery. Sex is a gift from God that is to be enjoyed and employed within the bounds of marriage and marriage is one man one woman for one life, a covenantal, conjugal, heterosexual, monogamous marriage.

Then from God's law we have the matter of do not steal so do they forcibly use the power of government to take from others to give to those whom they favor or that they think need it? Do they create ways for people when they earn things that they can then give out of generosity? In other words, does the state take and steal to give or does the state create an environment where people can work to give? That is what the Bible teaches us about the sanctity of work, where the Bible tells us to do our work as heartily unto to the Lord that we may have something to give to those who are in need.

Some people will say to me that a person is pro-life on abortion but not pro-life on welfare. Are you telling me that state is pro-life when it takes over welfare?? I would say that the government welfare programs have absolutely decimated the family, the sanctity of work and I would say the state has a vested interest in welfare but has a terrible delivery system of welfare. Individuals, no-profits and churches are the best welfare for they encourage it, and create ways to affirm it. So this is how I look at the sanctity of work and the sanctity of giving.

Then there is the matter of contentment – do they create contentment by creating opportunities within the opportunities as people take advantage of the opportunities or stay in power by creating division and envy? Do they see one pie of resources that the government then divides up to give to its citizens or do they see a culture and economic system where people are free to make as many pies as they want and give away pieces of the pie but they can give away pies to other people? It is that they not simply consume wealth but create wealth and create opportunities for others to have wealth. They don't encourage covetousness and envy but do they create contentment in society?

I don't want to overlook the fact of bearing false witness. You don't lie. You don't embrace what today has been called fake news, but you tell the truth truthfully, not just technically. So when I look at a parties platform I line the polices up with the standards of the Ten Commandments, because the law of God reflects the character of God and what God made us to do to love Him and love our neighbor as ourselves. This is the process I go through.

Bruce: That is very helpful. In the time we have left, each party says these are the primary issues and the moderator of the debate determines that these are the primary issues. So from a Biblical world and life view, help us see what those primary issues are for this election.

Harry: Before I get to this I want to say that not only do you evaluate content, but you evaluate competencies. This is an election about political skills. On the other side, though an incumbent says they are the outsider and their skills don't come from the political world, I think that is the problem for I think we need to clean it up so there they presented for you two choices. In the last debate Vice President Biden said that character was on the ballot so I take a look at character of both individuals. Take a good look at the records in terms of character. Is there language, deportment, conduct, corruption, shady dealings, etc.? Look at all of it and compare both.

When you deal with character I think there are two things to look at. One is their conduct in conversation and two their company, their colleagues. Who do they surround themselves with? Are they able to surround themselves with people who have strengths where they have weaknesses, even morally? The Bible says the blessed man does not listen to false counsel/bad teachers. Psalm 1:1 says [1] *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.* So how do they conduct themselves but who do they get around them?

Bruce: For instance, who would they pick as a vice presidential candidate, who would they put in a cabinet position, who do they have as advisors, who represents them publically?

Harry: So let me finish up with the primary issues of this election. I do believe this is two world views. Are we going to have a governmental directed nation that is a socialist nation? In the debate it was made clear – socialist medicine, the public option, leave the private. No, once you have taken tax payers money you put up a public option and you have just eviscerated the private industry. So are we going to have socialized medicine? Are we going to have income distribution or income opportunity? Are we going to do away with law and order in the name of defunding and removing or are we going to reform law and order by mending the flaws in law and order but affirm law and order? Are we going to have religious liberty or will the liberties of the free practice of religion be sacrificed to the secular sexual revolution? Then there is our healthcare system. Will we have health care reform or will we continue to build governmental welfare that destroys the inner city and families? Will we have the issue of energy and how will we sustain the economy with the energy that is needed? What is the role of executive legislation in the economy where one says we need to remove the regulations except those absolutely necessary and the other said regulations are very important because we don't have the time to get everything through a legislative process? Nobody is hiding it in a sense for everyone is making it abundantly clear. I think those are some of the key issues out there and I think it comes down to these issues before us. There is the role of law.

I think with this commitment to pack the court which is basically making the court another legislative branch, that is absolutely undoing our constitutional republic and the three offices that are outlined for us in Isaiah 33:22 (*For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us*) that James Madison used in the establishment of our three branches – the executive, judicial and legislative. Are we going to pack the senate with statehoods or are we going to pack the court? I think the competing world views really have at stake – are we going to maintain to be a nation of laws under a constitutional republic or are we going to move to an increasingly socialist form of government where it's top down authority and execution of, not equal opportunity with justice, but equality of distribution as determined by the federal government?

I want to remind you of the world view of what our founding fathers believed – power corrupts, increasing power increasingly corrupts. Therefore they wanted our power to be bounded by law – the Constitution – and the power to be closest to the people as possible so its accountable to the people that we would have a government of laws affirmed covenantally by the people, for the people and through the people. I think that is ultimately what is at stake in the competing world views.

Bruce: As we wrap this up I'd like to let people know there will be several Today In Perspective programs that will also cover the election that is before us as well.

Harry: We did one this past Friday and this past Monday where I look at this election from a Christian world and life view. October 6th and 16th also covered this. This entire week we'll be dealing with various issues particularly in light of the justice approval system of Amy Coney Barrett. I think people can make use of these resources to make informed decisions.

I have been told that many evangelicals have said we need to make room in the church for different policies even around the issue of abortion. I think it's important as a pastor that I make a comment on that and that is I do not believe that the violation of God's law is a valid policy to accommodate within a church. I do believe there is a political party that has decided the homicidal assault on the pre-born who are unwanted and inconvenient is a policy that we ought to live with and I cannot live with it. Do I want to minister to those in crisis pregnancies with centers, help and counsel? Absolutely. Do we want to reach out with the Gospel message? Absolutely, but I do not believe any direct violation of God's apodictic ethical law – you shall not murder – that in the church we should ever be pressured to think that's a policy to accommodate, even though a political party might declare it a policy and other evangelicals might call upon us to accommodate it. This is not a policy to accommodate for it's a violation of God's law and I don't believe I'm a single issue voter because of that. I believe if you get that wrong and make the homicidal assault of the pre-born anytime, anywhere, any place, even in the delivery room, that is going to filter into a death spiral in all of the other policies as well.

I wanted to make that clear because that question has come in many ways to me because a number of pro-life people telling us that issue should not keep our vote from a particular candidate or party and that we ought to have diversity of policies. If you're talking with me about a 20 percent tax or 25 percent tax that's another issue. Discussion of health care is another issue. But when you are talking about a law of God – thou shall not murder – that is never a policy to accommodate even if a political party says it's a policy. We treat it for what it is – a transgression of the apodictic ethical law of God and a matter of lament with hope and prayer that God would mend that flaw within our nation at this time as well.

Bruce: This has been incredibly helpful so take the law of God and use it as a filter and grid as God has given it. Pray and intentionally work your way through the opportunity to vote which the Lord in His sovereignty has allowed many to serve our country to give us that right to do. 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.