

Romans 3-5 - The Good News

Romans Series (Part 5)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Dec 1, 2013

Opening Remarks:

- A. Welcome back to another study of biblical history and eschatology from a full preterist perspective.
- B. Last time we covered the first of the five sections of Romans, in which Paul shut up all men, both Jew and Gentile under condemnation. That was Bad News to everyone, including Jews and Gentiles.
- C. In this session we will look at the second of the five sections of Romans, which we have labeled "The Good News."
- D. Before we get into that study, let's pray --

The ONE TRUE GOD, who is God not only of the Jews but all the nations, we praise and bless your Holy Name for grafting us into your chosen people. We are so grateful to you for allowing us to be justified by faith without having to earn that justification through law-keeping. Help us also to understand how we should live in response to that grace that you have poured out in our hearts. We know it is not an easy-believism or cheap grace, but rather daily dying to sin and living like Christ. May your Spirit illuminate our hearts as we study the words of your bond-servant Paul about your amazing grace and our grateful response to it. We pray this in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ who accomplished this redemption for us. Amen.

Report on the ETS Trip

Before we get back into our study of Romans, I want to give you a little report about our exhibit booth at the Evangelical Theological Society conference. That trip to ETS was the reason why we did not have a podcast last week.

I was in Baltimore last week at the Evangelical Theological Society conference. It floats around every year to a different city. Two years ago it was in San Francisco. Last year it was in Milwaukee. This year it was Baltimore, and next year it will be in San Diego.

In November of each year, we set up the exhibit booth at ETS to promote the preterist view to its two thousand (or more) attendees. This was our fifteenth consecutive year to do this, and every year **the benefits** for the whole Preterist movement keep getting better and better:

- Increases Visibility and Awareness of the Preterist view
- Provides a better understanding of it to those who are already aware of it
- Reduces the Resistance against it
- Promotes more Receptivity toward it
- Positions Preterism as CONSERVATIVE option within the Evangelical community.
Just by being allowed to exhibit there, it positions us as being conservative evangelicals. And that is extremely important, since they would never listen to it otherwise if we were coming from a liberal or skeptical perspective. We provide the most conservative response to the liberal critics who claim that Jesus was wrong when He predicted his return in the lifetime of His contemporary disciples. This very conservative option needs to be heard by those conservatives there at ETS, so that is why we exhibit there every year.

Every year the number of negative encounters at our exhibit booth has been less than the year before, and the number of positive encounters always increasing. The last few years there were no negative confrontations at all, and lots of very positive conversations. There were no speeches or paper presentations delivered against Preterism. And there were some speeches which used partial preterist hermeneutical principles on some of the eschatological texts. Our goal every year at ETS is to help those key leaders in conservative Christianity understand the preterist view and see it as a valid option within conservative evangelical Christianity. And it is working!

Attendees at this annual conference are key opinion leaders in conservative Christianity – theologians, seminary professors, writers, publishers, pastors, ministry heads, and media personalities in evangelical circles. We usually have a half dozen preterist guys who volunteer at their own expense to work in the booth and interact with the hundreds of attendees who drop by.

This ETS trip was one of the best. A big thanks to all of you who prayed for our work there. Those prayers were answered. We had several dozen great interactions with young seminary students. That is the focus of our effort, to introduce the preterist view to as many young guys as possible (before they are fully assimilated by the futurists).

Was really good to see at least three other full preterists there at ETS (Rex Geissler, Paul Anderson, and Dr. David Warren), in addition to our exhibit booth workers who were also full preterists (Dr. Michael Britton, Albert Pigeon, and Edmund Lee). It was also interesting to see the number of partial preterists who showed up at our booth. Fifteen years ago when we first started exhibiting there, almost no one had ever heard of the preterist view, much less had a position on it. Now the situation is completely reversed. Almost everyone there has heard of the preterist view, and has a basic idea of what it is all about.

We had wonderful preterist fellowship on Thursday night after ETS was over, at the home of one of the local preterists there in the Baltimore area. There were five of us there for some great study, fellowship, and interaction. I was amazed at how many biblical texts we dealt with in that short four-hour time period.

These efforts at ETS are enabling hundreds of conservative Christian leaders and seminary students to be introduced to the Preterist view every year. The truth marches on! But the costs are challenging. We sell very few books there, and the few we do sell are heavily discounted (in order to get them in the hands of those opinion leaders in the conservative Christian community). In addition to giving away hundreds of Russell's book and dozens of other individual books, there is the additional cost of renting and furnishing the exhibit booth space (over \$2000), plus the expense of shipping the books to the conference, plus my travel, food, and lodging for the five days of the conference trip. This takes a huge bite out of our budget every year, but we believe very strongly that it is worth every penny for the good impact we are having there. Minds are being informed, challenged, and changed. Our work at ETS has planted seed that is already producing good fruit for the cause of Biblical Truth. Every year we exhibit there is cultivating and nurturing those seeds even more. We sincerely appreciate those of you who enable us to do this work by your contributions. We can not do it without you.

Many of you prayed for our efforts there at ETS, and some of you sent donations to help offset some of those expenses. That was so very much appreciated. We could never do this without your prayers and financial partnership. We are also in the process of rebuilding our website with a shopping cart. That is a very time-consuming and costly undertaking as well. We would encourage all of our listeners to consider making a one-time donation or supporting monthly to help cover those costs. To do that, simply click on the following secure link (or paste it into your web browser):

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A Couple of Books You May Be Interested In

I found a couple of very helpful books dealing with the *New Perspective on Paul* while I was browsing the various publisher exhibit booths at ETS:

1. The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction. *By Kent L. Yinger.* It lives up to its title by providing an excellent introduction to the new ways in which the writings of Apostle Paul are being interpreted. Yinger is very fair in his explanation of the major new perspectives that have developed over the past forty years, including E. P. Sanders, James Dunn, N. T. Wright, Don Garlington, Francis Watson, Heikki Raisanen, Bruce Longenecker, and Michael Bird, as well as all their critics from the traditional side of the debate. If you want to get a handle on all this discussion about how Apostle Paul should be interpreted that is going on right now in the theological world and on the Internet, this book is a good place to start. The past four podcasts have given a pretty good explanation of my perspective on Paul, which is very much related to his goal of grafting the Gentiles into the Jewish Church and uniting both Jews and Gentiles into the one true spiritual Israel. My perspective takes all of the good stuff that has been developed by the other guys and puts it to good use for the preterist view of Paul.

2. Four Views on the Apostle Paul. *By Schreiner, Johnson, Campbell, and Nanos.* The four perspectives that are represented here are: (1) The traditional Reformed view, (2) A Roman Catholic view, (3) A Post-New Perspective view, and (4) A Jewish View of the whole debate. I have not read the whole book yet, but I did read most of the comments of the Jewish rabbi. It was amazing to see how well the rabbi understood the theological framework of Apostle Paul in relation to both Jewish-Christian law-keeping and Jew-Gentile unity. He pointed out Paul's diligent efforts to bring about Jew-Gentile unity in the universal kingdom of God before the End of the Age arrived. And he exposed the inconsistency of most futurists who agree that the End of the Age has not arrived, but who are not still keeping all the jots and tittles of the Law until the End arrives. That was the best part of the whole book for me, and was worth the price of the book just to hear his Jewish perspective on this whole debate about Apostle Paul. But I have not read everything in there yet, so I do not know whether the rest of the book is helpful or not.

If any of you are interested in obtaining copies of either or both of these two books, let me know. If at least five of our listeners email me and say that they would like to get these two books, I will order some copies for all of us. Here is my email address:

preterist1@preterist.org

Now let's get back into our study of Romans:

THE GOOD NEWS: (Rom 3:21–5:21)

Be sure you have your Bible open to Romans chapter three, so that you can see the biblical text as we talk about it.

We noted last time how Paul got the attention of both Gentiles and Jews in the first three chapters by "*making the whole world accountable to God*" (Rom 3:20). Paul showed first how all the other nations besides Israel had rejected God, rebelled against Him, and turned aside into all possible forms of evil and wickedness. Therefore God gave them up to become slaves of Sin. But the Jews were just as rebellious and wicked, and therefore God cut them off as well. The whole world was under condemnation. This was very BAD NEWS for all mankind, and especially for the Jews who believed they automatically had salvation guaranteed to them just because they were circumcised descendants of Abraham.

But Paul did not stop with that BAD NEWS. There is a happy ending to the story. God has provided a **way to escape** the condemnation and wrath, and it is all **by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone** – not by circumcision and law-keeping. That was very GOOD NEWS, for both Jews and Gentiles.

Justification Through Faith in Christ (Rom 3:21–5:21)

3:21-26 – *Justification Provided to all who believe:*

- God provided a means of escape from the condemnation. He provided the atoning sacrifice, and freely applied that forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation to all who believe in Christ, including both Jews and Gentiles.
- 21** – The righteousness of God (or justification) which was "manifested" apart from law-keeping, had already been witnessed by the Law and Prophets.
- 22-23** – That righteousness or *justification* was provided "to all who believe in Jesus," without distinguishing between Jew and Gentile, since both Jew and Gentile alike were under the same *condemnation*, and both needed the same justification.
- 24-26** – That justification could not be earned by good deeds or law-keeping, otherwise the Jews would have already had it. It could only be obtained "as a gift by His grace" (24) to "the one who has faith in Jesus" (26). The gift was available to all believers on the basis of what Jesus did on the Cross: "through the *redemption* which is in Christ Jesus" (24), "whom God displayed publicly as a *propitiation* (appeasement of God's wrath, or satisfied the demands of justice) in His blood" (25). That sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross proved that God kept His covenant promises, regardless of the fact that the whole world had rebelled in unbelief (26). God is righteous and just in keeping His promises, and is therefore in a position to be the justifier of all those who have faith in Jesus (26).
- Notice all the heavy-duty theological words that are used in this section (3:21-26): *righteousness, justification, grace, redemption, propitiation, and forbearance*. These were terms which both Jews and Gentiles would have readily understood, since they relate to the sacrificial system, which both Jews and pagan Gentiles engaged in. Of course, the Gentiles made sacrifices to demon-gods, but the principle of atonement, propitiation, justification, and redemption was very similar.

- Notice also in this section that Paul's focus is on God's saving all believers (both Jew and Gentile) through the *sacrificial* work of Christ on the Cross (i.e., substitutionary atonement).
- We also need to note here that the idea of a "resurrection" of a collective body out of dead Judaism is nowhere to be found here in these first five chapters. It has to be imported into the context by allegorical and spiritualizing hermeneutics which redefine every soteriological term here with a new eschatological meaning behind it. And, of course, that approach to bible interpretation is called Eisegesis (putting a meaning into the text that was not already there).
- The foundation for the rest of the book of Romans (especially chapters 6-11) is built right here in the first five chapters, but here in these first five opening chapters we do not even see a hint that Paul is talking about a resurrection of a collective body out of covenantally dead Judaism. That ought to raise a serious doubt about whether the collective body idea is being discussed in chapters six and following, since it is not mentioned in the first five chapters where Paul sets up his argument for chapters six through eleven.

3:27-28 – *Justification only through faith and apart from works of law:*

- Regardless of whether the Law forbids boasting about one's own righteousness, it is a moot point anyway in view of the fact that no amount of law-keeping could justify anyone. The only way anyone can be justified is by believing in Christ. So, justification comes only through faith, and not by meritorious works or law-keeping.

3:29-30 – *Is God ONLY the God of Jews and NOT Gentiles?*

- Paul here is pointing out the implications of *monotheism* (the idea that there is only ONE God, not many gods). Devout Jews recited the *Shema* every day ("Yahweh is our God. Yahweh is one." Heb. "Adonai Elohenu, Adonia Echad"). This was a very strong affirmation of the fact that there was **only one God** in the universe, and His Name was Yahweh. This implies that Yahweh must be the God of all the nations, not just Israel, and therefore must save all those who have faith in Christ, regardless of which nation they come from. This was an implication of monotheism which the Jews may not have clearly understood, so Paul points it out to them in unmistakable terms, borrowing language from the *Shema* which they recited every day. This must have been a bombshell in the minds of his Jewish readers.

3:31 – *Does Justification by Faith make the Law worthless?*

- In view of his preceding argument about Yahweh being the God of all nations and not just Israel, it would be logical for the Jews to conclude that law-keeping and being in the covenant of circumcision with Yahweh was therefore meaningless, purposeless, and worthless. But Paul quickly disallows that idea by showing that even though law-keeping could not justify, the Law still had a valuable purpose and significant place in the overall plan of redemption. Leon Morris said it well:

Paul has already laid it down that the law (as well as the prophets) **witnesses** to this salvation (v. 21). The law is the divine **preparation** for the way of salvation in Christ, but it is not itself the way of salvation. Jesus said that he came to fulfill the

law (Matt 5:17), and he did so in his life and in his death. Paul has been insisting, as the law also does, that all people are sinners. He has pointed out that the righteousness from God, the divinely worked out way of salvation, is attested in the law and the prophets (v. 21). Christ's atoning death means the working out of what the law really means. When we see this, we see the place of the law – "we establish the law." (Morris, 189)

4:1-8 – *How Was Abraham Justified, by works or faith?* Obviously by faith alone. This would have been a very challenging idea for the Judaizers to accept.

4:9-12 – *Was Abraham Justified Before or After Circumcision? Before circumcision!*

This would have been another bombshell for the Judaizers there in Rome to contemplate. The true circumcision was inside the heart (as Moses taught in Deut 10:16; 30:6; cf. Rom 2:29), by the same kind of faith that Abraham had before he was circumcised. And this kind of faith was something which the uncircumcised Gentiles could have just as easily as the circumcised Jews, because it was the same faith that Abraham had before he was circumcised.

4:13-25 – *Who Inherits the Promises Made to Abraham? Law-keepers or Believers?*

Justification by circumcision or law-keeping was futile. God's justification comes only by His Grace through our faith in Christ.

5:1-5 – *What They Now Had as a Result of Justification.* [Note their expectations]

- Peace with God (reconciliation)
- Introduction into this grace (justification, salvation)
- A standing in this grace (a status of being in God's grace)
- [EXPECTATION STATEMENT] *Exultation* in **hope** of the **Glory of God**. What was this hope? They were **expecting** to see and experience this Glory when it was revealed to them. Paul says in Rom 8:18 that this Glory was "about to be" (Gk. *mello*) revealed to them. These were living saints who would still be alive at the time of the Parousia, and they would see this glory revealed to them. They were exulting in that hope of **seeing it revealed**.
- *Exultation* (and not sorrow) even in **tribulation** (because it purified them and increased their fruit and heavenly reward in the afterlife).
- [EXPECTATION STATEMENT] **Hope that will not disappoint**. Their hope was fulfilled. It was not disappointed. They absolutely must have seen the Glory of God revealed to them at the Parousia. Did they experience that event in a cognitive way? Did they know about it afterwards? If they were *exulting* about it **beforehand**, why weren't they *exulting* about it **afterwards**? Do you see the problem with that if there was no rapture? The reason we do not hear them exulting about it afterwards is because they were no longer on earth. They had been taken to heaven where they were then able to see the Glory of God face to face. There is a problem here for those who do not believe in a first century rapture. Do you catch the power of that?
- Love of God poured out in their hearts
- Holy Spirit was given to them

5:6-11 – *Christ Died FOR them while they were helpless, ungodly, sinners and enemies – so that they could be justified, reconciled, and saved from the wrath about to come!* The sacrifice of Christ reconciles **both Jews and Gentiles** back to God. Jesus died for them while they were still his enemies. It is rare enough for someone to die for their friends, but Jesus died on behalf of his enemies!

5:12-19 – One man's sin brought death to all men (because all men sinned). Death reigned until Christ died for all men, so that His grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life.

5:20-21 – The Law was given, not for the purpose of justifying us, but to more clearly identify the utterly sinful state of man, so that we would realize that there was no way we can redeem ourselves. *This was a critical function of the Law.* It set the standard so high that no man could keep it perfectly. The Law pointed out just how sinful we really are, and desperately lost we are without the grace of God through Christ. The Law revealed the **bad news** and whetted their appetite for **the good news**. And Jesus provided that good news when He died on the Cross to enable our justification and redemption, which applied equally to both Jews and Gentiles.

Conclusion:

The point that we do not want to miss in all this, is that every one of Paul's arguments here are laser-focused on convincing the Jews that Gentiles are fellow-heirs of the grace of life, and reminding the Gentiles that their salvation comes through faith in the Jewish Messiah Jesus. Neither the Jews or the Gentiles had any reason to boast. Both were under the same condemnation, and both could only be saved by faith in Christ. Therefore, they both needed to come together in Christ and accept each other as fellow-heirs of the Kingdom. They both needed to live transformed lives of righteousness and sanctification out of the gratitude they had for Christ's sacrifice.

The focus here is not on Israel exclusively, but rather on all men (Jew and Gentile alike). All are under condemnation equally. *There is not the slightest hint here in these three chapters (Rom 3-5) that Paul is setting up some kind of collective body argument focused exclusively on old covenant Israel. Instead, his focus here is on proving that all men, especially the Gentiles, and even the Jews, were universally under condemnation.*

Nowhere in these three chapters (3-5) does Paul refer to justification and imputed righteousness as being a resurrection of a dead collective body out of old covenant Judaism. That idea has to be imported from outside the context, because it is not found here in this context.

The only reason we preterists are having difficulty understanding Romans is because of the confusion that has been introduced into the study by the untraditional approach

of the Collective Body View. When we take a more traditional approach to it, the book of Romans is much easier to understand.

Therefore we need to ask how chapters three through five of Romans lend any support to the Collective Body View. I am not aware of any significant usage of these three chapters of Romans by the Collective Body advocates to support their concept of a collective body. Their major use of Romans is focused on chapters six through eleven, and so when we get to those chapters in our study next time, we will be talking a lot more about how they use it to support their view. But the collective body view is not found here in the first five chapters, and this is where we would expect to find it, if Paul is in fact setting up the foundation for a collective body argument in chapters 6-11. So, if it is not here in chapters 1-5, that casts serious doubt upon whether it is found in chapters 6-11 as well.

So far we have seen both the **bad news** and the **good news** here in the first five chapters. Next time we will see how both Jews and Gentiles were expected to live in response to that good news. What kind of lifestyle changes would they need to make as an expression of their faith and gratitude? And this raises another question against the collective body view of Romans 6-11. The fact that Paul is talking about the kind of lifestyle that they needed to live in response to the grace of God, shows that chapters six and seven especially are dealing with that change in lifestyle. Chapter seven is explicitly talking about the struggle that those saints were having as they tried to live godly lives as an expression of their gratitude for their justification.

That automatically shows that chapter seven cannot be talking about a collective body struggling to be resurrected out of covenantally dead Judaism. That collective body idea has to be shoe-horned (imported) into the context. It is not there otherwise. **Claiming** it is there, and **proving** that it is there, are two different things. All I have seen is claims and assertions, without any contextual and exegetical proof. We will see why I say this in our upcoming sessions on Romans 6-11. You will want to read those chapters this week before we begin to study it next time.

That will wrap it up for this session. Hope that was helpful for you. Please email me and let me know what you are learning in this study of Romans. Thanks so much for listening.

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