

Romans - Meaning of Creation

Romans Series (Part 8)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Dec 22, 2013

Opening Remarks:

- A. Thanks for joining us here in our continuing study of the biblical book of Romans from a full preterist perspective.
- B. Last time we looked at the question about what is "THE sin" that is mentioned in Romans 6:1. We scanned all 39 verses of Romans which use the word "sin" and found numerous exceptions to Sam Frost's theory that the presence of the definite article automatically meant it was referring to the specific sin of Adam. We noticed that the presence or absence of the definite article ("the") in connection with the word "sin" was not consistent in the Greek. Sometimes the phrase "the sin" was referring to the sin of Adam, and other times it was referring to generic sin or sinfulness of all mankind. The same goes for those occurrences of "sin" without the definite article. Therefore the presence of the definite article in the phrase "the sin" can not be used as proof that it is only referring to the specific sin of Adam, and never to any other kind of sin.
- C. In this session I had originally planned to study the subject of baptism as it is dealt with in Romans 6:3-4. However, I received an email this week from a listener who wanted my evaluation of a lesson on Romans 1:20 that he had heard recently. Since that question directly relates to our interpretation of the book of Romans, I decided to hold off on the study of baptism until we dealt with this new question on the meaning of the two words "**creation**" and "**made**" as used in Romans 1:20. Next time, Lord willing, we will look at the place of water baptism in the Kingdom today after the arrival of the Eternal Kingdom in AD 70.
- D. Before we get into our study, let's ask God's blessing:

The Most High God, who alone dwells in unapproachable light and glory: We exalt You and adore You for creating us and choosing us to be your servants and using us to help others be reconciled to you and blessed by You. Be with us in this study of Paul's letter to the Roman saints. Help us understand it and properly apply it to our lives today in your kingdom. We pray this in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

What "Creation" is Paul Talking About in Romans?

Since this question about the identity of the "creation" mentioned in Romans is related to the whole debate between the two major resurrection views within preterism, it might be helpful for some of our listeners who are new to that discussion if we defined some of our terms and explained what the various views teach.

All of our listeners are probably aware that I hold to the **Individual Body View** (IBV) of the resurrection, which teaches that the disembodied souls of the dead saints were raised out of Hades at the Parousia and given their new immortal bodies with which to dwell in heaven forever afterwards.

The other major resurrection view within Preterism is the **Collective Body View** (CBV), which teaches that a "collective body" of believers (the church) was raised out of old covenant Judaism at the Parousia to share in the new life of the Collective Body of Christ (the Eternal Kingdom).

I have been challenged on my use of the label "**Collective Body View**." Those who take that view prefer the label "**Corporate Body View**" instead. However, that is redundant. The word "corporate" comes from the Latin "corpus" (body) or "corporare" (form into a body). Since the word "**corporate**" already means "**body**" it is redundant to use it with the word "body" in the phrase "corporate body view." That is like saying they believe in the "**body-body view**" -- obviously redundant. Sounds like a bodily dichotomy of some sort. Instead of a body with two heads, it would imply a head with two bodies! That is why I use the label "collective body," because it is a much more distinctive label which more accurately describes what they actually teach. They believe the body that was raised in AD 70 was a "collective body" of believers, NOT a "body-body" of believers! That may seem like a trivial point, but terminology is important. We need to use labels that clearly and accurately describe our views, as well as point out the differences between those views. The label "corporate body" is too ambiguous, nebulous and redundant, especially for preterists outside the USA for whom English is a second language. And especially if they come from one of the Latin-based languages which defines the word "corporate" as meaning "body." This "body-body" label would be confusing and ambiguous to them. So I have chosen to label it as the "collective body view," since that is much more clear, accurate and descriptive.

We also need to explain what the *Covenant Creationist* view is all about. They take the position that the creation of the heavens and earth spoken of in Genesis 1-2 is merely an allegory about the creation of the nation of Israel when Moses led them out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. They do not believe Genesis 1-2 is talking about the creation of the universe, nor about the creation of the first two human beings on the planet. They do not think that Adam and Eve were the first two human beings ever created. They think that the Adam and Eve story was simply an allegorical representation of the covenant relationship between God and the nation of Israel. They see the first eleven chapters of Genesis as non-literal and non-historical in the traditional definition of those terms. They adamantly reject the ideas of a Young Earth, a literal six-day creation, and a global flood in Noah's day. They instead yank Genesis 1-11 out of the whole historical and cosmological discussion, and throw it into the allegorical arena, as merely a figurative description of the formation of Israel at the Exodus.

Like I did when I first heard of Covenant Creationism, you are probably asking yourself, "Where in the world did they get that idea from?" Those like Michael Bennett and others who have critically analyzed Covenant Creationism have shown that the Covenant Creationists took the valid typological similarities between the creation of the original

world in Adam and the creation of the new world in Christ and went to an invalid allegorical extreme with it. They were not satisfied with the *typology* between the FIRST ADAM and the LAST ADAM, so they went way beyond that to make the FIRST ADAM into an allegory of covenantal man (representing the nation of Israel under the Law of Moses). This means that they do not see Adam as a literal physical human being who was the physical TYPE of the spiritual man Christ Jesus. They instead see Adam as allegorical of the old covenant man (the nation of Israel, the body of Moses), in contrast to the new covenant man (the Church, the body of Christ). Just as the old covenant man was created at the Exodus out of Egypt, so the new covenant man was created at the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus (or at Pentecost).

There are many problems with their covenantal allegory approach to Genesis, but the main point that we need to note here about it, is that they are ripping the creation of the physical universe and the global flood of Noah's day totally out of our Bibles and asserting that Genesis is only an allegory of the formation of Israel at the Exodus.

The reason I bring the Covenant Creationist view into the picture here, is because some of the Collective Body guys (like Larry Siegle and others) are teaching some things which are very compatible with Covenant Creationism, even though they deny that they are Covenant Creationists.

For instance, a well-known preterist leader, who happens to teach the Collective Body View of the resurrection, in his recent study on Eph 2:10 took the position that the usage of the word "creation" in Romans 1:20 is referring to the creation of the nation of Israel at the Exodus, and not to the creation of the universe. Here is what he said about that:

----- Beginning of Quote -----

Eph. 2:10 For we are His **workmanship [poiema]**, **created [ktisthentes]** in Christ **Jesus** for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. NASB

The word "workmanship" (in Eph 2:10 above) is from the Greek word *poiema*, which means: "a product, thing that is created or made, workmanship." ...I find it interesting that *poiema* is only used here in Eph 2:10 and in Rom 1:20:

Rom. 1:20 For since the **creation [ktiseos] of the world [kosmou]** His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through **what has been made [poiemasin]**, so that they are without excuse. NASB

...I don't think Paul is talking about the physical creation in this verse. The context here leads me to believe that he is talking about Israel. **Israel is the "creation."** The Greek word used here for "creation" is *ktisis*. So it is possible that "creation" in the text of Rom 1:20 is not referring to the material creation, but to the **creation of the covenant people Israel.**

...Romans [1:20] speaks of **God's physical people Israel**, and Eph 2:10 speaks of **God's spiritual people, the new creation.**

----- End of Quote -----

[ED'S RESPONSE] If Paul here in Rom 1:20 was indeed talking about the formation of Israel as a nation at the Exodus, why doesn't he just come right out and say it? Why all the veiled language here? Why doesn't he say "since the Exodus" or "since the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai" or "since their entrance into the land of Canaan"? Why did he use language that normally referred to the creation of the universe in Genesis?

Furthermore, if Rom 1:20 WAS referring to the creation of the cosmos in Genesis, and applying it to the creation of the nation of Israel, it would mean that Genesis is talking about the creation of the nation of Israel as well, and NOT talking about the creation of the universe. Here is the logic he seems to be using (If A=B and A=C, then B=C):

Rom 1:20 - (A) "**creation of the cosmos**" = (B) "creation of Israel"

Gen 1-2 - (A) "**creation of the cosmos**" = (C) "creation of the heavens and earth"

Therefore, by his logic, he would have to believe that the Genesis account of the "creation of the heavens and earth" is talking about the "creation of Israel" as a nation.

That is exactly what the Covenant Creationists are teaching. No wonder the Covenant Creationists are so cozy with the Collective Body View! The Collective Body View is making it easy for them to argue their case for Covenant Creationism! That is exactly what we see happening here with this dear brother's comments on Rom 1:20.

Even though he has repeatedly disavowed any connections between his Collective Body View and Covenant Creationism, we see here in his comments an unmistakable connection between the two views. We have to wonder how he missed this connection!

Moreover, if "creation of the cosmos" (Rom 1:20) is definitely referring to the "creation of the heavens and earth" (Gen 1-2), as Paul seems to be doing here, then it opens up the possibility (which the Covenant Creationists fully exploit) that every reference to the "creation of the heavens and earth" (or cosmos) throughout the whole Bible is referring to the "creation of Israel" as a nation. How can this dear brother consistently escape the Covenant Creationist implications of that? He has stuck his foot right in their bear-trap!

Let's look at the text in Romans 1:20. Notice the words in red boldfaced and underlined text below --

Romans 1:20 For since the **creation of the world** His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. NASB

Now in the context, Paul appears to be talking about the Gentiles ever since the creation of the world not having an excuse for their immorality and idolatry, because in the created world around them they could see that there was a God and what His nature was really like. So that seems to be what Paul is saying here, yet this dear brother wants to redefine the words "creation of the world" to instead mean the "creation of Israel." So let's exchange the phrase "creation of the world" in the verse above, and replace them with the phrase "creation of Israel" and see if it makes any better sense. Here is how it would read:

Romans 1:20 For since the **creation of Israel** His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. [Covenant Creationist Version]

Notice any problems here? We certainly do. First of all, it means that Paul was teaching that the invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature of God COULD NOT be "clearly perceived" by anyone until the nation of Israel was created at the Exodus. That means that no one, not even Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, could understand the "invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature of God" until the Exodus -- no one could really understand who God is and what He is really like until the nation of Israel was formed. Is that what Paul is really teaching here in Romans chapter one? Of course not!

In the context, Paul is talking about the Gentile nations having no excuse for their immorality and idolatry because the "invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature of God" was clearly discernible in the natural world around them, from the very beginning of creation. The Gentile world NEVER had an excuse, not even before Israel was a nation, because the universe around them clearly revealed the one true God and His divine attributes. The Covenant Creation and Collective Body views turn Paul's argument against the immoral and idolatrous Gentiles on its head. *It ends up giving the Gentile nations an excuse for their immorality and idolatry until the nation of Israel came into being at the Exodus!* Do you see the problem here for the Collective Body View and the Covenant Creationist View?

Nor does it help their argument any when they assert that the word "made" (Gk. poiema) here in Romans 1:20 is referring to the "making" of Israel into a nation at the Exodus. Here is how they understand the verse:

Romans 1:20 For since the **creation of Israel** His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what **God has done with Israel**, so that they are without excuse. [Covenant Creationist Version]

Again, that turns the meaning and intent of Paul's words here totally upside down. The context is very clear that Paul is talking about the Gentile world perceiving the nature of God ever since the natural world was created, so that they never had an excuse for their immorality and idolatry. This verse cannot be talking about the formation of the nation of Israel at the Exodus, unless we want to accuse Paul of giving the Gentiles an excuse for their wickedness before the foundation of the nation of Israel! How do you think Paul would feel about that argument? I suspect he would see it as a clear example of "the untaught and unstable twisting his inspired writings to their own destruction" (2 Pet 3:16).

But wait, there's more! Since this dear brother asserted that the word "creation" (*ktisis*) here in Rom 1:20 is the reference to Israel (instead of the word "world"), it means that he has to translate the verse in the following way (to be consistent):

Romans 1:20 For since the **Israel of the world** His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

But that translation makes total nonsense out of this verse! He has gone from a veiled reference to Israel, to total confusion. Inserting "Israel" in place of "creation" here would totally disrupt Paul's flow of thought. He would be better off taking the word "world" as a reference to Israel, rather than the word "creation"! At least that would make some sense out of the verse, even it is the wrong sense. But he does not do that. The only word he attaches the meaning of Israel to, is the word "creation."

Furthermore, in his comparison of Eph 2:10 with Rom 1:20, he noted that these two texts are the only two places in the New Testament which use the Greek noun *poiema*, translated as "**workmanship**" (Eph 2:10) or "**what has been made**" (Rom 1:20). He claimed that the "workmanship" or "what has been made" in these two texts is a reference to Israel. Let's replace those words with "Israel" and see how it reads:

Eph. 2:10 For we are His **Israel**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Rom. 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through **Israel**, so that they are without excuse.

Even without looking at the context, it is easy to see how disruptive this word substitution really is. It would mean that Paul (or the Holy Spirit) has deliberately thrown a curve ball to his Gentile readers at Rome. If Israel was what Paul had in mind here, it means that he worded this so obscurely that only a fellow Jewish Christian who understood Paul's code language would have had a chance of grasping it, and even that is doubtful. No commentary throughout church history has noticed that meaning until Max King came along and shoe-horned it into the text where it obviously does not belong. However, both the Covenant Creation and Collective Body views desperately NEED that meaning to be there, in order to support their views.

Neither of these two uses of POIEMA in Rom 1:20 and Eph 2:10 are referring to Israel as the creation or workmanship of God. Rom 1:20 is simply referring to the things God "made" (POIEMASIN) at the "creation" (KTISEOS) of the "world" (KOSMOS) in the beginning (Gen 1-2); while Eph 2:10 is referring to the Church as being God's "workmanship" (POIEMA), created (KTISTHENTES) in Christ Jesus for good works (ERGOIS). So, although it is true that Israel is the creation or workmanship of God, that is not what these two texts are talking about, and these are the only two occurrences of the word (POIEMA) in the NT.

[NOTE: For more info on the lexical meaning and usage of the Greek word POIEMA as used here in Rom 1:20 and Eph 2:10, please see the Appendix.]

Conclusion:

So, just because Rom 1:20 **CAN** be interpreted that way, does not at all mean that it **MUST** be interpreted that way. That is a form of argumentation that all the cult groups use to establish their heretical doctrines. The question is NOT what does our paradigm NEED it to mean, or what can it be TWISTED to mean, but rather what does it ACTUALLY mean in its original historical context? Context is king here, as always.

The Bereans did not superimpose their preconceived traditional interpretation upon Paul's preaching. They did not PUSH their own Judaic or rabbinical interpretations into Scripture, but rather PULLED their interpretations out of Scripture itself. They went into Scripture to see what it ACTUALLY taught, rather than bringing their own paradigm to the study and forcing Scripture to AGREE with their predetermined interpretation.

This is the problem with both Covenant Creationism and the Collective Body View. They both assume there is a covenantal or collective body built into every soteriological and eschatological text, and that they have no obligation to prove that it is there, but instead merely to show how that text fits into their overall covenantal or collective body system. However, that is assuming what they need to prove (a logical fallacy in hermeneutics). They need to prove that the covenantal or collective body concept is actually there, before they start interpreting the text in a covenantal or collective body way.

In summarizing the problems that we have just noticed here, one of our listeners made the following very perceptive comment:

Have "His invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature" only been clearly seen since the creation of Israel? Weren't those attributes also obvious in the creation event? And if the "they are without excuse" only refers to Israel, then is Romans 3:23 also only about Israel? If so, that would totally jettison the keynote text used for total depravity, i.e. no one is without excuse. And if it only pertains to Israel, it does not apply to anyone else after AD 70, and that would put us on the hyper-cessationist (Chris Camillo) bandwagon!

Do you see the danger that he is pointing out here?

We will say more about all this when we deal with the use of the word "creation" in Romans chapter 8, where it plays a much bigger role in the whole discussion about their adoption as sons, the redemption of their bodies, and being set free from slavery to corruption. Since it was mentioned in chapter one, we needed to be somewhat familiar with it, before we get to chapter eight.

Next week, Lord willing, we will deal with the subject of baptism, since it is referenced right here in Romans 6 verses 3 and 4.

That will do it for this session. Hope that cleared up some things for you. If not, don't hesitate to email me with your questions. I would love to hear from you.

Thanks so much for listening.

APPENDIX: Lexical Meaning and Usage of POIEO and POIEMA

POIEO (verb form)

Although the noun form (*poiema*) is only used twice in our NT (Rom 1:20 and Eph 2:10), the verb form (*poieo* -- to do, to execute, to act) is used 568 times in 514 NT verses, plus another 3208 times in 2796 verses of the OT Septuagint. POIEO is a very common word, with a wide variety of meanings depending on the context. For instance, the verb form is used of the earthly WORK of Jesus, which included WORKS of power (miracles), legalistic works (doers of the Law), doing good, doing bad, etc.

UBS Lexicon -- Notice the wide range of meanings for POIEO

make, do, cause, effect, bring about, accomplish, perform, provide; create (of God); produce, yield, bear, put forth; give, prepare, keep, celebrate (of feasts, etc.); claim, pretend (to be somebody); show (mercy, etc.); work, be active; live, practice, act (καλῶς π. do good, act benevolently or kindly); spend, stay (of time); exercise (authority); wage (war); execute (judgment); give (alms); appoint (Mk 3:14; He 3:2); consider, count (Ac 20:24); often with a noun as a verb equivalent, e.g. π. δέησιν pray (Lk 5:33); π. τὸ ἱκανόν please, satisfy (Mk 15:15); π. λύτρωσιν redeem, set free (Lk 1:68)

POIEMA (noun form)

BDAG: (on *poiema*)

Definition: that which is made, work, creation, in the NT only of the works of divine creation ... [God's] invisible nature is perceived with the mind's eye by the things [God] created (Rom 1:20) ... Of Christians, we are God's creation, i.e. God has made us what we are (Eph 2:10).

Louw & Nida's Semantic Domain Lexicon: (on *poiema*)

that which is made -- product, what is made. ...we are what he has made (Eph 2:10).

Liddell & Scott Intermediate Greek Lexicon: (on *poiema*)

"deed" or "act" -- Herodotus and Plato used the word *poiema* in reference to "a poetical work, or poem," but the NT does not use it in that sense.

LEH Septuagint Lexicon: (on *poiema*)

"work, deed, or act"

Mounce Greek Dictionary: (on *poiema*)

That which is made or done; a work, workmanship, creation, Rom. 1:20; metaphorically in Eph. 2:10.

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