



ZENDER ON ROMANS VOLUME 1, CHAPTERS 1-4

by Martin Zender

Excerpt from: INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS: VOLUME 1, CHAPTER 1

Are there any sinners out there? Aha. I thought so. Do you want to know how God can look you straight in the eye and think well of you? Read Romans. Or maybe you want it to work the other way. That is, you want to be at peace with God even though He sometimes comes across as though He is upset at you. The prescription is the same. Read Romans.

Not only is God not upset with you, but He likes you. In fact, He could not be more happy with you. It's all in Romans.

Martin Luther became acquainted with God by reading the book of Romans. Luther studied Romans—legend has it—while spending large amounts of time on the toilet. Historical evidence points to the fact that the man had digestive and theological problems simultaneously. (Some believe these maladies were related; I am one of them.) Martin Luther's mind tortured him about whether or not God liked him, or whether God deep down thought he was fat and ugly. (With Luther, there was no middle ground; he was a man of extremes.) Romans settled the issue for Martin Luther forever, and it can do the same for you. The book of Romans allowed Martin Luther to enjoy beer for the rest of his life without feeling guilty. Tastes great. Less filling. No guilt. Wow! Beer did make him fat, however—according to several eyewitnesses.

Being pronounced “not guilty” by God doesn't alter what sin does to our bodies. Luther's tub o' lard proportions, however, failed to frighten off the Luther-loving Deity. If Jesus were on earth today, He would definitely drink beer. Unlike Luther, He would know to stop before becoming fat. Jesus would drink enough beer to make Him happy and sand the edge off life's horrors.

Romans is different than the rest of Scripture. All other Scripture falls short of the grace unveiled by Paul in this letter. All other Scripture—besides Paul's letters—was penned to Israel and pertains to law. The best thing a sinner can hope for under law? A probationary pardon based on repentance. Three things. Did you get them?

Here they are in proper order:

- 1) repentance
- 2) pardon
- 3) probation

Israelites had to a) feel sorry for their sins, b) analyze their walks constantly, and c) confess their sins to God every other day, at least. Yes, repentance involves all this. If an Israelite did this sincerely and

with proper reverence (no gum chewing during repentance, please), God granted him or her a pardon. A pardon means, “You sinned, but since you confessed it, we are going to overlook the penalty.”

The problem with a pardon is that it is probationary, that is, God keeps dropping by your house to make sure you’re still keeping up with the repentance. If you aren’t, then the pardon is revoked and you have to start over.

You know the drill.

Sin is not at all treated this way in Romans. In fact, the book of Romans slaps pardon in the face.

Don’t feel bad for those Scriptures teaching nothing but pardon. You will find these Scriptures in what is known as “the gospel of the Circumcision” (Galatians 2:7) or “the Israel gospel.” This is the gospel heralded by the terrestrial Jesus Who, when He was on earth in a human frame, was called by Paul in Romans 15:8, “the Servant of the Circumcision, for the sake of the truth of God, to confirm the patriarchal promises.” The patriarchal promises were those promises God made to Abraham that he and his seed (Israelites) would one day rule the earth. Peter became the caretaker of this gospel. More on this in Volume 2. (For more information about how Paul’s gospel differs from the Circumcision gospel, order my book, *The First Idiot in Heaven*.)

Paul received his gospel from the glorified, resurrected Christ—not the Jesus Who came to earth in a Jew suit and ministered only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24). Paul’s gospel is called “the gospel of the Uncircumcision” (Galatians 2:7), or “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). Paul’s gospel teaches justification rather than pardon. There are big differences. For one thing, pardon assumes guilt while justification denies it.

So as I was saying, the Scriptures in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (and other places where Israelite teaching is sold) don’t mind that they teach pardon only. Why would they? These Scriptures aren’t meant to teach justification. All they want to do is pardon. They don’t know anything but pardon. Your cat doesn’t mind when you bathe the dog, because the cat doesn’t want to be bathed. Leviticus doesn’t want unlimited grace. It doesn’t know anything about it. It’s not in its nature to look at people and say, “You’re righteous no matter what.” Leviticus throws stones instead. It doesn’t look over at Romans and envy it. Leviticus does its thing, Romans does its thing. Since the other Scriptures don’t intrude upon Romans, and Romans doesn’t intrude upon the other Scriptures, I want you to stay away from pushing these disparate books into places neither of them want to go. Stop trying to make them mingle at the same dinner party. It’s like adding chocolate syrup to the pâté de foie gras. When you mix Romans with the other Scriptures, you create an unpalatable mush. You read about grace in Romans on Friday, but then on Saturday you kill a goat. Well now. This sort of activity will eventually give you more lower bowel trouble than Luther. The goat won’t like it either.

In Romans we have complete vindication before God. It is as though God is looking down from His judge’s bench and saying, “Not guilty!” Wouldn’t you love to hear that? What if you were dragged before a judge having been accused of hundreds of crimes that you actually did commit? Let’s say you

habitually stole hubcaps, robbed liquor stores, murdered people, and jaywalked. You come up before the judge, and you're naturally worried. You're defenseless. Everyone knows you're guilty. In fact, you've admitted as much. The bailiff drags you in by your ear. You eventually dare to look up at the judge, and there sits your Father, smiling from the bench, winking at you.

What I just said may make some people mad. This hypothetical criminal ought to be punished. In our legal system, he would be. But in the legal system described in Romans (that is, in God's legal system), there is no punishment for these sins, no, not even the sin of jaywalking. Is this because Jesus Christ was punished for our sins? No.

It is because God took all of our sins and put them on Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ died, He took all our sins with Him. When He rose from the dead, He arose without them. Now they're all gone. God didn't punish Christ; He sent Him to us as a love letter to take away our sins.

It's that simple. It's that unbelievable (which is why most people can't believe it). And yet it is true.

This is what Romans is here to say.

How can sin be gone—just like that? Don't people have to pay for their sins? Why doesn't God enact revenge? Isn't He upset? Why doesn't He make people pay, pay, pay! At least with a pardon, God initially blames the person and saddles them with guilt. At least in the Israel gospel, God says, "You're guilty as a rotten pomegranate, but if you confess your sin, cry a lot, and promise not to do it again, I will let you off the hook."

None of that in Romans. Romans is radical. If you're not radical, you will not like the book of Romans. It's going to be hard for some of you to believe that your past, present, and future sins are gone. (This juicy treat is known as Justification; I always like to capitalize it.)

That's why, for this four-volume adventure, I am going to take you step-by-step through the entire book of Romans. Why? Because Romans is an entire book. Besides that, you are only going to get this great news concerning sin from the book of Romans. And for some of you, you are only going to get this great news concerning sin from the book of Romans from me. That's fine. I got it from somebody, too.

I dare you to find the phrase "God says you're righteous" anywhere else in Scripture. I'm not really daring you. Don't try; you won't find it.

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