

Responding to Roderick Edwards' About Preterism

by Don K. Preston

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FORMER PRETERIST RODERICK EDWARDS has written two books attempting to refute the truth of Covenant Eschatology. This article will address what Edwards claims is the foundational issue that is being all but overlooked by all anti-preterists except him. (Interestingly, it “seems” at times that every former preterist thinks that they have found the “silver bullet” that others have missed with which to refute preterism. This makes, in a bit of irony, his own “private interpretation” to be the key to refuting preterism!) A few preliminary thoughts from Edwards’ book.

Edwards’ Bold Claim

Edwards claims, “Preterism by nature is a private interpreter’s paradise.” Of course, he is appealing to Peter’s statement:

. . . knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20).

Edwards’ take on this passage is actually a distortion of what it says. He claims that no individual has the right to interpret the Bible for himself. This is where Edwards’ own presuppositions come into full view. Edwards believes in the authority of “Church history,” the creeds of the church and even the patristic writers. His claim is specious.

What is more than revealing is that Edwards cautions his readers to not hastily engage in biblical discussions with preterists because, as a rule, preterists have “often spent large amounts of time honing their arguments” (p 50). He warns, however, that because preterists have engaged in in-depth study for long hours, this does not prove that preterism is true. That is true. I know people who have spent hours reading the Bible but whose entire theology is misguided—like that of Edwards.

On pages 54f, Edwards gives lip service to Scripture, “the perspicuity of Scripture will win the day every time.” So, the Scriptures are (ostensibly) the ultimate authority and will win the day, but students should be cautious about engaging preterists on what the Bible says about eschatology! Instead, Edwards says that the only proper way to address preterism is “primarily one that asks preterism to explain how God could have failed to properly teach His people His eschatological plan.” Edwards says the proper way to defeat preterism is to not engage in discussions about what the Bible says about eschatology (*catch the power of that!*)—but to discuss God’s sovereignty! (Makes one wonder where Edwards would appeal to for an understanding of God’s sovereignty, does it not? Does he suggest a philosophical discussion of this issue,

or a “biblical” discussion? And would not that discussion of the sovereignty of God not be a discussion of the private interpretations of the respective sides)?

Is Edwards’ appeal to 2 Peter valid? Notice what the text *does not say*. It does not say that individuals have no right to study the Scripture for themselves and determine the truth. Paul’s own teaching would refute that, when he spoke: “*how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)*” (Ephesians 3:3f NKJV). This text perfectly reflects 2 Peter 1:20—Revelation (prophecies and doctrine) did not originate in the minds of men. Revelations were given by the Holy Spirit to men who wrote them down, confirming that Word with miracles. Those written records were distributed to the churches and, when read, were to be understood—read that “interpreted”—by the readers / listeners. But in Edwards’ paradigm, the individual members had / have no right or authority to read, or to hear and understand. They must be told by someone else what it means. This smacks strongly of Catholicism, in which members have historically been told that they have no need—or responsibility—to study the Bible. The church will tell them what it says and means. I have had Catholics tell me this very thing! Of course, Edwards would have you to believe *him* when he seeks to inform his readers about the errors of preterism.

The point is that 2 Peter 1 does not disparage or condemn private (individual) study of the scripture. Notice Acts 17:11: “*The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that they studied the scriptures daily, to see if the things that he [Paul, DKP] said were true.*” All they had were the Scriptures—the Tanakh—and the individual Thessalonians studied the Old Testament to determine whether this man who claimed to be inspired was telling the truth! This utterly falsifies Edwards’ claims, and his disparagement of “private interpretation.” The Bereans did not have any Church council, creed, or Church history to tell them if Paul was right! They did not have any “rabbinic counsels” to guide them. They could not be guided by ANYTHING except Scripture, and when they used the Scripture, and Scripture alone (no history, no creed, no council) they came to the truth. Yet, Edwards cautions his readers against following the example of the Bereans!

It should be obvious that Edwards actually disparages reliance on *Sola Scriptura*. He castigates “private interpretation” based on a distorted application of 2 Peter 1:20. Scripture nowhere—EVER—devalues private study, individual interpretation as Roderick Edwards does. Thus, the very foundation of his objection crumbles to the ground.

Edwards’ Chief Objection

We move now to consider Edwards’ chief objection, based on his interpretation about the sovereignty of God. Here is what Edwards claims is the fundamental issue:

“The challenge to preterism is then primarily one that asks preterism to explain how God could have failed to properly teach His people His eschatological plan.

. . . if God is sovereign and in control of His message and plan; it is clear His intention was that His new Covenant people; especially as manifested as the Church would comprehend His message and plan.

What preterism must do is get you to reject this notion. Preterism must get you to either believe one of three things:

Christians were not better off at understanding and teaching God’s eschatological plan than the Jews.

God was unable to relate His plan in a way that Christians could understand and teach to future generations.

People actually corrupted what God related and thus foiled God’s intention.

This is where every interaction with preterism must begin. It cannot and should not begin with an examination of a person’s interpretation of any specific verse but rather it should begin with what the person thinks of God’s sovereign ability to carry out His intentions.” (*About Preterism*, pp 54, 56-57).

So, for Edwards, although “the perspicuity of Scripture will win the day every time” he clearly holds the view that this is NOT true, since we are to discuss issues of God’s sovereignty independently of what the Bible may say about eschatology. In reality, Edwards is demanding that a person accept his view of the sovereignty of God independently of what the Bible says about eschatology. Or at the least, we must view eschatology through the prism of his personal interpretation of God’s sovereignty. This is a massive case of *petitio principii* (i.e., begging the question, assuming that his view of God’s sovereignty is the correct view. And once again we would ask, where would Edwards go to prove his views of God’s sovereignty? It would be to the Scriptures, which he says can’t be interpreted privately—yet he does just that). A concise summary of Edward’s view can be stated like this:

Point #1 - If God is sovereign, man could never distort it or prevent it.

One thing that must be kept in mind is that there are conditional and unconditional promises in Scripture (see Jer 18). The fact is that the Parousia, judgment and coming of the kingdom were never conditional. God’s sovereignty would ensure their fulfillment, in spite of man (cf. Psalm 2). So, Edwards needs to explain to his readers how it is that God’s sovereignty failed to fulfill those hundreds of time indicators, all of which pointed to a first-century fulfillment.

Point #2 - Was God unable to relate His plan in such a way as to be understood?

What about the hundreds of temporal indicators that pointed—undeniably so—to the first-century fulfillment of the end of the age, Christ’s Parousia, the judgment and resurrection? *Can God tell time?* And can He, *did He*, communicate truthfully about the imminence of those events in Scripture? Edwards

denies that God communicated truthfully about the imminence of those events in Scripture. For Edwards, *soon* did not mean *soon*. *Shortly* did not mean imminent. *At hand* did not mean temporally near, and “*in a very, very little while*” meant, well, who knows what Edwards says about this! The reality is that man has, most assuredly, distorted and perverted God’s time statements! Is that God’s sovereign fault?

Point #3 - If preterism is true: “People actually corrupted what God related and thus foiled God’s intention.”

There is an admixture of Edwards’ presuppositional theology and bad logic, not to mention ignorance of Scripture at work here.

Remember, in Edwards’ view of God’s sovereignty, if God is sovereign man should not have been able to pervert the truth about eschatology to such an extent that the truth was lost. Consider the following:

Two Critical Facts to Consider

Fact #1 - Jesus Himself said that there would be a massive apostasy in the first century, so much so that “the love of the majority” would grow cold (Matt 24:10-12 NASV). That apostasy was to be so widespread that Jesus pondered, “*When the Son of Man comes, will he even find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18:6-8; it would not matter if Edwards would apply this text to the future. The text still demands a massive apostasy prior to the Lord’s coming, and that fact negates Edwards’ objection). Not only so, but Paul said that before the Parousia and resurrection could occur “the *apostasia*” had to take place (2 Thessalonians 2:1-5).

One has but to read the New Testament epistles to know that a massive apostasy from the truth of the Gospel did happen in the early church:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Gal 1:6-9).

Ask yourself the question: Was this apostasy God’s will? Was He not sovereign enough to prevent it from happening? Did the Judaizers so pervert the Gospel of Christ as to thwart God’s will for the Galatians—and the other churches? What about the doctrinal aberrations and distortions that took place at Corinth? Was that a violation of God’s sovereignty? Was man more powerful than God?

These questions pose a serious threat to Edwards’ preconceived doctrine of God’s sovereignty. He is entirely ruling out that “*we have this treasure in earthen vessels*” (2 Cor 4:7) and that God granted to the earthen vessels the freedom—and responsibility—to read, to know, to understand, and to obey the truth.

Edwards poses a question about eschatology: The challenge to preterism is then primarily one that asks preterism to explain how God could have failed to properly teach His people His eschatological plan. More straw man argumentation based on Edwards' faulty view of God's sovereignty.

Did God communicate truthfully about the time of the Parousia (we can also ask if He communicated about the *nature* of that event, (Luke 17:20-21)—but we are keeping this as basic as possible). If He did, then any misunderstanding lies, *not with God's ability or will to communicate truthfully*, but either in mankind's ability to understand, or (and this is critical) their refusal to bring their understanding of the nature of the event into conformity with the timing of the event.

Consider: Did the apostles teach the truth *about God's grace*? Did God inspire them to such an extent that they knew and taught the truth about Grace? He clearly did! But what happened? Well, some heard Paul teach about "*the width and length and depth and height*" of God's love and grace, and came to the conclusion: "*let us sin that grace may abound*" (Rom 6:1f). Was that perversion of grace God's fault? Was He not in control of the Truth concerning grace? How is it that, "People actually corrupted what God related" about grace, as Paul declared they did? How could that perversion of grace become so dominant and widespread in the early church if God is in control and exercises His sovereignty *in the way Edwards suggests*?

Would Edwards argue that God—in His sovereignty—was unable (or unwilling) to communicate truthfully about the time of the end? After all, the Bible is very clear that, "*of that day and hour knows no man, no not the angels or the Son, but the Father only*" (Mark 13:30-32). And keep in mind that in Revelation it was the Father (who knew the day and the hour of the consummation) that told John to write of the impending destruction of Babylon (the city where the Lord was crucified) "*the hour of her judgment has come.*" That "hour" was the hour of the coming of the Son of Man at the harvest of the earth, i.e., *the resurrection*! Thus, the Father was revealing the time! But of course, Edwards rejects that, and claims that we still don't know the time, even though the Father revealed it 2,000 years ago!

Fact #2 - The NT records that there was an apostasy / perversion of eschatological truth at a very early time.

Let me ask the reader to consider this. Edwards is proposing (claiming) that if God is truly sovereign (as he perceives that sovereignty) it would not have been possible for the first-century saints—or supposedly, the church through the ages—to so distort and pervert that truth to such an extent that it would result in loss of the truth. But there is another side to this issue of God's sovereignty.

In Edwards' view of God's sovereignty, i.e., in the Reformed / Calvinistic view, every single thing that is done or that occurs was / is *predestinated*. That means that if (since) there was an apostasy, a loss of proper understanding of eschatology, then that apostasy was foreordained / predestinated by God in His sovereignty! It is thus not a question—certainly not in Edwards' paradigm—of whether, "God is or isn't in

control” (*About*, p. 59). His own argument is self-defeating. [Let me interject at this point that Edwards has been in the past a believer in the Reformed view. I could find nothing on his website that was informative as to his current beliefs in this regard but have no reason for thinking that he has changed his views. I am therefore basing my comments on what I knew from past interactions with him.]

Now, let’s allow Scripture to answer the question about a large-scale apostasy:

. . . and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Did Peter believe that men were, when he wrote, perverting eschatological truth? Undeniably. In so perverting that truth, would they have been leading others to lose that truth? Who could deny that? Was that distortion of eschatological truth “fatal” to those who were leading others astray?

In an even earlier epistle, written circa 50-52 AD, Paul addressed those who were teaching that “*the Day of the Lord has already come*.” And in a later epistle, circa AD 66-67, he spoke of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who were teaching “*that the resurrection is already past*” (2 Tim 2:18). We thus have several NT texts that inform us of a widespread apostasy, loss, and distortion of eschatological truth as early as AD 51! Was this a violation of God’s sovereignty? Was God not able to communicate sufficiently clearly to prevent this apostasy? How could this have happened if God is sovereign? (In Edwards’ view of sovereignty, it could NEVER have happened, but it patently did. Therefore, Edwards’ view of God’s sovereignty is severely called into question).

Side Bar: Of course, Edwards and his supporters would note that Paul condemned Hymenaeus and Philetus for teaching that the resurrection was past, and that preterists are guilty of the same error. But that is an anachronistic argument (at best). It does not address the issue here: Would God’s sovereignty prevent such distortions of the truth—as Edwards’ suggests it must? Patently not. Furthermore, one must ask: If the resurrection is what Edwards and all futurists envision, a time-ending, earth-burning time when all the dead / decomposed bodies come out of the grave, at the destruction of creation, how could anyone convince anybody that such an event was already past? See my book *How Is This Possible?* for an in-depth analysis of this, as well as my book *The Hymenaeian Heresy: Reverse the Charges!* Order both books and I will refund shipping. They are available from my website.

Another text informs us about eschatological apostasy in the first century—Romans 11. In that chapter Paul addresses the Gentiles who were claiming that Israel had been completely cut off (cf. 1 Cor 15—no resurrection for “the dead ones” was the claim there, the “dead ones” being Old Covenant Israel). The fact is that biblical eschatology is inextricably linked with the end of Israel’s covenant history. Thus, to claim

that God was through with Israel was to affirm that the Day of the Lord had come (2 Thess 2:1-2). It was to affirm that the resurrection was fulfilled (2 Tim 2:18).

So, in Romans, ca. AD 57, we find a massive distortion and misunderstanding of the true story of eschatology and Israel's role in it. (Lamentably, this same misunderstanding of the role of Israel in eschatology still dominates the millennial and postmillennial world). But, once again, in Edwards' book and in his claims about God's sovereignty, "God is either in control or He isn't," such an egregious and widespread abandonment of the truth of eschatology should never have taken place. And it should never have continued, as it most clearly did in the patristic writers.

How / Why Did That Apostasy Take Place

The question can be asked, what was the source of the loss of proper understanding of eschatological truth in the first century? I think one of the chief reasons was the Hellenization of the early church that caused the church to lose contact with the Hebraic understanding of apocalyptic language and covenantal thought.

Tom Holland notes how the inter-testamental writings are often appealed to by scholars and Bible students to help interpret the NT writings. He offers this cautionary note:

There is no doubt these documents give fascinating insight into this period of Judaism, but their relevance for the New Testament message must be questioned... They assume there is a strict equivalence in terminology and themes found in these writings and in the New Testament. They use intertestamental texts as the key for understanding the New Testament texts. This presupposes they share the same theological outlook and their meanings are transposable. However, this understanding is flawed. (Holland, Tom: *Romans: The Divine Marriage* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 23).

He also offers this:

While the vocabulary of the NT could be found throughout the Hellenistic world, it did not have the same meaning when it was used in the religious sense within the Jewish community." (252); Holland notes that when a NT writer wrote in Greek it was "Hebrew in its mind-set and essential meaning." (P. 52). (Tom Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology*, Christian Focus Publications, Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-Shire IV20 1TW, Scotland, UK, 2004, 52.) (www.christianfocus.com) or, www.tomholland.instant.org.uk.

Other scholars agree. Graydon Snyder says of Hebraic eschatology:

"It affirms the absolute validity of God's promises to mankind through Israel and of the historical locus of its fulfillment; yet denies that present history or the present institutions of man could lead to its

fulfillment. . . . Paul proclaimed this eschatological form not only in terms of mythology of the cross, but also with a more full orbed apocalyptic framework. In the Hellenistic world this apocalyptic form was understandably misunderstood. In some instances it was literalized dualistically (i.e. the myth becomes a cosmology) so that a struggle between flesh and spirit resulted. In some instances it was misunderstood chronologically (i.e. the myth becomes history), so that an actual end of time was expected . . . the chronological misunderstanding resulted in a problem regarding the delay of the parousia to such a point that the community was forced to identify that disjuncture with the baptism or the birth of Jesus rather than to speak of a radical disjuncture yet at hand. . . in other words, the problem of the delay of the parousia is a problem only in so far as the early community misunderstood and literalized the apocalyptic..” (*The Literalization of the Apocalyptic Form in the New Testament Church*, Chicago Society of Biblical Research, Vol. 15, (1969), 5-18).

David Instone-Brewer, although discussing the differences between Hebraic thought on marriage and divorce versus the Grecian understanding, makes some very pertinent observations:

The Early church was soon separated from the Synagogue and the Jewish world was itself cut off from part of its past by the destruction of Jerusalem. Background knowledge that could be taken for granted in the original readers of the New Testament disappeared from the Church. (David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Re-Marriage in the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2002, Intro, p. X).

Finally, among many other sources that could be cited, Richard Hays offers this: “The Christian tradition early on lost its vital connection with the Jewish interpretative matrix in which Paul had lived and moved; consequently, later, Christian interpreters missed some of Paul’s basic concerns” (Richard Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination,,: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2005, 43).

Personally, I think that this Hellenistic divorcement from the Hebraic roots of apocalyptic is one of, if not the chief reason, for the loss of understanding of eschatology. There are other factors perhaps, but Snyder is surely correct in his assessment. From reading Edwards’ book, it surely seems that he is either unaware of this reality, or simply chooses to ignore it. Now, why, in Edwards’ view of the sovereignty of God, did the Lord allow this divisive, destructive Hellenization of the early church? The reality of this loss is undeniable, the consequences of it are indisputable.

So, the point can be made that God could and did communicate sufficiently and authoritatively about His plan and His will. “*Holy men of God spake as they were moved along by the Spirit*” (2 Peter 1:19) and they wrote down that revealed Truth. God “guaranteed” the true revelation of His Truth and kept His promise. However, the Lord never guaranteed that every man would understand that revelation as it was intended. We know from Scripture itself that they did not. And we all know people who have no idea

about audience relevance, about history, about language, about even the idea of “context,” about hermeneutic, about exegesis, who read the Bible a bit and declare themselves to be the final word about what it says! We witness this on social media virtually every day.

Is this God’s fault? Is it the fault of the revealed Word or the Spirit or the Father? Patently not. And it is inappropriate and wrong to call the sovereignty of God into question due to our own mistaken concepts of that sovereignty. Yet, Edwards wants to blame God for the misunderstandings, distortions, and perversions of Scripture when the consistent testimony of Scripture is that God communicated the Truth faithfully, but that it is man’s own fault for perverting the Truth that was faithfully revealed and recorded.

What About Martin Luther?

I and others have made the point that Luther was charged with being guilty of giving his own “private interpretation” in opposition to 1000 years of “church history” and the creeds. Edwards denies this, claiming that Luther actually appealed to the “ancient faith” and that he cited other theologians who taught what he did. This argument has no actual validity and flies in the face of the accusation brought against Luther. The emperor Charles, who was leading the trial proceedings, lodged this charge against Luther:

For it is certain that a single brother is in error if he stands against the opinion of the whole of Christendom, as otherwise Christendom would have erred for a thousand years or more.” (Cited in *Beyond Creation Science*, Timothy Martin and Jeffrey Vaughan).

So, the actual charge against Luther was that he was a “lone wolf” standing in opposition to 1,000 years of the creeds, the councils, the church, and church tradition. In other words, according to the leaders of Luther’s trial, contra Edwards, *they accused Luther of private interpretation*, of violating church history, of opposing the traditions of the church, the very thing that Edwards accuses preterists of doing. And look deeper.

Edwards says Luther appealed to theologians and “the ancient faith” of those who taught like he did. Well, did Luther appeal to any creed? No. Did he appeal to any council? No. In significant contrast and contradiction to Edwards, who suggests that it is not wise to engage in exegetical discussions based on Scripture alone with preterists, Luther took a clear stand:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by clear reason, for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, I am bound by the Scriptures that I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot to do otherwise. Here I stand, God help me. (April 19, 1521). <https://www.expositormagazine.org/new-blog/2018/4/11/martin-luther-and-sola-scriptura>.

Not only this, but, when Edwards claims that Luther appealed to those other theologians, he is actually saying that Luther cited other men who gave their own “private interpretation” of Scripture. He certainly had no creed, or council, to support him. Thus, Edwards’ attempt to escape the force of Luther’s appeal to Scripture alone, and his refusal to rely on tradition, creeds and councils is destructive to Edwards’ claims. They are totally misguided and refuted.

A Closing Thought on Edwards and the Sovereignty of God

One should give careful thought to Edwards’ view of the sovereignty of God. Remember, Edwards claims that if God is truly sovereign there could not have been a loss of the truth concerning eschatology. Compare that with the atheist’s argument on the sovereignty of God. The atheist argues that if God exists, and if God is good and sovereign, then evil could never exist. But evil surely exists. Therefore, either God does not exist, or God is either not good or not sovereign. But if God is not good, or not sovereign, then He is not God. {Note: This very argument was made by an atheist on YouTube: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=706602160468162>}

Does Edwards accept this view? No. But why not, since logically there is a one-to-one comparison between his concept of the sovereignty of God and the atheists’ argument. It seems patently clear to me, however, that Edwards needs to seriously rethink his claims about preterism and the sovereignty of God. His argument opens the door wide for the application of the atheist’s argument.

So, what have we seen in this consideration of Edwards’ Objection?

Edwards devalues and discourages the study of Scripture alone to settle issues of eschatology. Yet, we have shown *from Scripture* that from the very beginning of Christianity individuals went to the Scripture, and Scripture alone, to determine the truth.

Edwards attempts to deflect attention away from Scripture by focusing on the sovereignty of God, claiming that, “God is either in control or He isn’t.” (He never explains the source of his doctrine of the sovereignty of God, but of course, he would claim it is from Scripture. Yet he urges folks not to use Scripture alone. The irony here is incredible). This is obfuscation and exposes the fallacy of Edwards’ own view of the sovereignty of God. If God’s sovereignty was applied in the way that Edwards is suggesting, there would have never been such widespread apostasy as described in the biblical texts.

We have shown that Edwards’ own Reformed view of God’s sovereignty, which teaches that every single thing that happens was predestinated before the world began, means that the apostasy that did happen was in fact *predestinated by God*. Thus, Edwards’ claim that if God is truly sovereign—in total control of every event—there would have been no apostasy, is falsified by his own view of God’s sovereignty.

We have shown that:

There was a massive apostasy from the truth in the first century, and,

Part of that apostasy was about eschatology.

We have shown that Edwards' attempt to "re-tell" and "re-frame" the story of Martin Luther is in fact wrong. It denies or falsifies the actual charges brought against Luther, and, more importantly, ignores Luther's appeal to Scripture alone, the very thing that Edwards eschews.

With these facts indisputably established, Edwards' entire argument about the sovereignty of God is falsified, and his Objection is Overruled!✝