



**Issues, Etc.**<sup>TM</sup>  
Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio

## TRANSCRIPT

Rev. Todd Wilken, Host

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### "A Review/Critique of Eugene Peterson's Bible Paraphrase, *The Message*, Part 2"

Guest:

Dr. Andrew Steinmann

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Author of Concordia Commentaries on *Daniel*, *Proverbs*, and *Ezra & Nehemiah*,  
and *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*

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**PETERSON AUDIO CLIP:** The followers of Jesus, in their witness and preaching, translating and teaching, have always done their best to get the message, the good news, into the language of whatever streets they happen to be living on. In order to understand the message right, the language must be right. This version of the New Testament in a contemporary idiom keeps the language of *The Message* current and fresh and understandable in the same

language in which we do our shopping, talk with our friends, worry about world affairs, and teach our children their table manners. The goal is not to render a word-for-word conversion of Greek into English, but rather to convert the tone, the rhythm, the events, the ideas, into the way we actually think and speak.

**WILKEN:** That's Eugene Peterson in one of his introductions to his popular Bible

paraphrase, *The Message*. Now, he says getting the language right matters. But he's not talking about the words themselves. He is talking about the ideas, the tone, the impression, because that's really all you can get out of a paraphrase rather than a translation.

We are going to evaluate some very important passages – especially with regard to the Lord's Supper, to Baptism, to Absolution – in this hour of *Issues, Etc.*, looking at *The Message* the way it renders that language as compared to the original language.

I'm Todd Wilken. This is *Issues, Etc.* Thanks for tuning us in. We're coming to you on this Friday afternoon, August the 10<sup>th</sup>, and Dr. Andrew Steinmann joins us for part two of a review of the Bible paraphrase, *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson. Dr. Steinmann is a regular guest. He's Professor of Theology & Hebrew at Concordia University Chicago. He's author of the Concordia Commentaries on the books of *Daniel*, *Proverbs*, and *Ezra & Nehemiah*, and he's author of the book *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*.

Dr. Steinmann, welcome back to *Issues, Etc.*

**STEINMANN:** Always good to be back with you, Todd.

**WILKEN:** Dr. Steinmann, last time we talked about some of the narrative of the Old Testament, some of the narrative of the New Testament. We got into some of the theological passages as well. But you expressed some strong caution about *The Message* paraphrase then. After having looked in preparation for this hour at these key theological passages – especially on the Sacrament – in the New Testament, are you more or less cautious about *The Message*?

**STEINMANN:** Yeah, I'm more cautious and much more concerned, because here in these passages we find a lot more deviation from the underlying theological assertions of God's Word. And that should make us very, very suspicious of this.

**WILKEN:** Why is it important? I've had this practice since my Seminary days – when a new translation comes out, or one that I'm unfamiliar with, I will almost immediately go to the passages we're going to look at here, on Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Absolution, to kind of check to see the bias of the translator. Even in a translation; much less a paraphrase. Why is that important to do?

**STEINMANN:** Well, because those passages are kind of the canaries in the coalmine, if you want. They really are indications of a person's understanding of the Christian faith, understanding of what God is or isn't saying in the Bible, and especially their understanding of very important articles of doctrine, like justification, like the two natures of Jesus Christ, or what we call Christology, and so forth. And these are key teachings of Scripture, and those all come together in the Sacraments. And so these passages just become bell weather passages for the accuracy of a translation, and whether the translator is bending things to his own beliefs, whether those beliefs are correct or mistaken.

**WILKEN:** Now, is that especially so? In translations, often we're dealing with very honest renderers of the language, even if they have biases. They're very honest; they will not toy with it. In a paraphrase, is it especially so that the biases will come forth?

**STEINMANN:** Yeah. With a paraphrase, oftentimes what you have is the person thinking, "Well, I'm trying to give the meaning here, and I'm trying to," as Peterson said, "make it understandable." Well, he's making it understandable the way

he understands it, not necessarily according to the words of the revealed Word of God, not according to the words that St. Paul used or John used or Isaiah used.

**WILKEN:** So we're going to start looking at some of them, dealing first with Baptism, then we'll move onto the Lord's Supper, and then I think John 20 on Absolution. We'll start with Romans 6, the first five verses – a famous passage from St. Paul on Baptism. Here's how Eugene Peterson's *The Message* renders it.

**THE MESSAGE AUDIO CLIP:** So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving? I should hope not. If we've left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there? Or didn't you realize that we packed up and left there for good? That is what happened in Baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind. When we came back up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace, a new life in a new land. That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we were lowered into the water, it was like the burial of Jesus. When we are raised up out of the water, it's like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father, so that we can see where we're going in our new, grace-sovereign country.

**WILKEN:** This is really strange. He has done a couple very interesting and disturbing things with this passage on Baptism, hasn't he?

**STEINMANN:** Oh, yeah. He has done some radical changes, so much so that what you're really getting is, I think, what Eugene Peterson wished St. Paul said rather than what St. Paul actually said.

**WILKEN:** So he starts out with – and you want to note it – “what do we do?” Why is that problematic?

**STEINMANN:** Well, it's very problematic because St. Paul says, “What should we say about this?” He's been having a discussion about sin and justification and showing that both Jew and Gentile are justified by faith, and that what we do does not enter into our justification. And so St. Paul says, “What should we say about this?” He's asking, “What should our attitudes be towards this?” Eugene Peterson changes this to “What should we do? What action should we be having?” Paul's going after what's in the heart and mind; Peterson is going after the outward actions. St. Paul says, “What should we say about this? Should we keep on sinning? What's our attitude toward sin?” Eugene Peterson changes it to “What should we do? Should we go on sinning?” And so he changes Paul's whole focus from our attitude, which is the whole point here. Paul's talking about the attitude in the heart, faith or unbelief, as being important in our justification, and not what we do being important in our justification. And Eugene Peterson flips it right on its head.

**WILKEN:** Now, the other thing he does that just sticks out like a sore thumb in listening to it, to someone even casually aware of what Paul says there, not only in the original but in the reliable translations: he says, “Now that we have left the country where sin is sovereign,” what does Paul say there, rather than “left the country where sin is sovereign”?

**STEINMANN:** Paul says we've died to sin. And the point that Paul is making is not just that we're some kind of immigrants; that we've gone to some other country – we can always immigrate back if we want. He says, “We're dead. We can't go back. There's been a change here. We have died to sin.” And so by changing the language of Paul to this kind of – I guess he's assuming it's a metaphor for going to live in a new country – he's really changed the whole image that the reader gets.

**WILKEN:** He also omits Christ from a key passage here?

**STEINMANN:** Yeah. Christ is mentioned a couple times here in this passage, and the word “Christ” does not appear anywhere – or any equivalent for it like “Messiah” – does not appear anywhere in these five verses. And I find that shocking, because St. Paul is teaching here that we’re baptized into Christ, or Christ Jesus. When he mentions Jesus, Christ always comes first. And that’s very important because Christ, of course, is Greek for “anointed one.” The Hebrew there is “Messiah,” corresponding to that. This is the whole point: that Jesus is the Messiah, and when we’re baptized, we’re baptized into the Messianic fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament. We’re baptized into all those things God planned for ages, starting with His promise to Adam and Eve and on to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and David and the things that the people of Israel looked forward to for millennia were fulfilled in Christ. And now in our baptism, we’re incorporated into Christ, into the Messiah who was long-awaited, who has saved the world through His life, death, and resurrection. And nowhere here is Christ mentioned.

**WILKEN:** Now, we’ve got about a minute or so before we take our first break. What is Peterson’s view of Baptism that just kind of overshadows the original text to such a degree that it’s no longer recognizable? What’s his view of Baptism?

**STEINMANN:** Well, he views Baptism as something that we kind of do, I think, and he views it as having a specific mode. You’ll notice he mentions a couple times going under the water, coming up out of the water. You get the idea that he thinks it must be immersion, or even though I don’t think he actually believes that – he’s a Presbyterian; they don’t always immerse – I guess he thinks that that’s kind of always what’s implied in the word “baptism.” And of course

it isn’t. And so I think he thinks of this more in a symbolic manner, rather than in a Sacramental manner. And so he puts in phrases like “went under the water, came up out of the water,” when Paul doesn’t say a thing about the mode of Baptism in this passage.

**WILKEN:** Well, let’s take a break. One more thought on this Romans 6 chapter when we come back, and then we’ll look at another Baptism chapter where, similarly, egregious mistakes are made in the Bible paraphrase, *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson.

These are key. Dr. Steinmann’s quite right – these are the canaries in the coalmine. When the canary fell over limp and dead, you realized something was wrong, and already the canaries are falling with regard to Peterson’s *The Message*. Stay tuned.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I’m Todd Wilken. Dr. Andrew Steinmann is our guest. Part 2 of our review of the Bible paraphrase, *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson.

Dr. Steinmann is author of the book *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*. This is one of those books that I think every pastor and layperson has kind of been waiting for. It’s difficult, when you read the Bible, even at the level of a theologian or a pastor, to keep the timeline straight. You need something that says, “This happened here,” even gives the probable or sometimes even the most definite dates, and “this happened there,” for the relationship of the things in the Old and New Testaments, but also for a clear and accurate dating of these things. We do, after all, have a Savior who entered into real history that can be found on the calendar. That’s the great strength of this resource from Dr. Andrew Steinmann and Concordia Publishing House. It’s called *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*. Find out

more about it at our website, [issuesetc.org](http://issuesetc.org). Click "Listen on Demand," or you can call Concordia Publishing House. They would be happy to send you a copy of *From Abraham to Paul*. Call and order it: 1-800-325-3040, 1-800-325-3040.

Dr. Steinmann, one more question on the Romans 6 passage. He just comes out and says it: that being baptized is *like* the burial of Jesus. It's *like* the resurrection of Jesus. Does Paul say such a thing?

**STEINMANN:** No. Paul actually says we *are* buried with Christ, and I found this very shocking, because I've never seen anybody do anything like this before. Peterson makes the same move with Baptism here that Zwingli wanted to make with Luther on the Lord's Supper, to say the verb "is" isn't "is," it means something else. Well, here he comes out and says "is" is really "like." We *are* buried with Christ, and we *did* rise again with Christ, and that's why we're to walk in newness of life, according to this passage, because we have risen with Christ. It's not that Baptism is *like* the resurrection, it's *like* the burial – no, Baptism *is* our burial in the tomb with Christ and our resurrection with Christ. It's the seal and guarantee that as we were there with Him now, we will also reign with Him in eternity.

**WILKEN:** Very quickly, just in this simple case – and I don't want to be too hard on Peterson, but I think we have to be as hard as necessary. Is he doing violence to the text?

**STEINMANN:** Yeah, what he's really doing is he's saying this is – and again, Peterson was a Presbyterian pastor – he's basically saying, "This is how I understand the text," not, "This is what the text says." And one of the nice things about good Bible translation is it leaves what the text says. We can argue and have meaningful disagreements among Christians about what "This is My body" means, or about what it means that "We are buried with Christ." But then to turn

around and just take the original language out for what you think it means is doing such violence to the text that the reader cannot possibly make up his or her mind on their own – that they cannot possibly be led by the words of the Holy Spirit to the Holy Spirit's meaning, because you've interposed your sectarian interpretation on it.

**WILKEN:** Here's another key passage, and this is from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, his rendering of Galatians 3, beginning at verse 25, I believe.

**THE MESSAGE AUDIO CLIP:** But now you have arrived at your destination. By faith in Christ, you are in direct relationship with God. Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe: Christ's life, the fulfillment of God's original promise.

**WILKEN:** This is a short one, but what did you find there that caused you some concern with regard to how Peterson is rendering this Baptism passage?

**STEINMANN:** Well, he starts out by saying, "You've arrived at your destination," as if we have done something here to get to this point. That's not what St. Paul says. Paul says, "Faith has come." It's not that we've done anything, but that the Holy Spirit has brought faith into our hearts. And so, again, he changes the pure work of God to our work. Then he goes on to talk about being in a direct relationship with God. And I don't want to say that Christians aren't in a relationship with God. However, that's not what St. Paul says here. Paul says, "We're no longer under a guardian." He's been talking about the fact that in many Greek cultures, children, before they came of age, were put under a guardian, or what was called a pedagogue. And this person, often a slave in the household, was to see that the child, usually the young boy, made it to school, did their schoolwork, did all the things they were supposed to do. Well, this

is, for Paul, a metaphor of how the Law of Moses operated for the people of God in the Old Testament. It was a guardian until Christ came and they became – they reached their majority, like a child who now has become an adult. And Paul says, “We’re no longer under a guardian,” not, “We’re in a direct relationship with God.” Paul does go on to talk about a relationship with God, but that relationship isn’t just some type of generic relationship with God. Paul says we are sons of God by faith. Through faith, we have been made sons of God. And Paul is being very specific here, because, again, in Greek households, the people that he was writing to, like the people in Galatia, they would have understood this to mean that they had all the privileges of a household. They weren’t slaves in the household. They weren’t daughters, but they were sons, and sons had a great privilege of being that. And what St. Paul is saying to the Galatians – and I’m sure he understood that women would hear this as well as men – is they all, women and men, had the privileges of the sons of the household. In this case, God’s household. And so by just reducing it to a direct relationship, you lose the whole thrust of what Paul is saying, that you have this great privilege that God has bestowed on you. You’re no longer under a guardian, but instead, God has adopted you and given you all the privileges that a son would enjoy in one of these patrician Greek households.

**WILKEN:** He uses that language of “dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe: Christ’s life.” Go into some more depth there. What’s the problem?

**STEINMANN:** Yeah, it doesn’t say in the Bible we’ve been given a faith wardrobe. Paul, again, here says we are clothed with Christ. Okay, in Baptism, we literally put on clothes that make us look like Christ to God. We appear to God as pure and righteous as Christ is, even though we are sinners. And so in Baptism, this is the great gift that God

gives us. He reduces it to, “You’ve been given Christ’s life.” We’ve not just been given Christ’s life, we’ve been given *Christ*. His life, certainly, His death, His resurrection, and His righteousness. And it’s His righteousness that God sees, and that’s the great gift that God bestows on us with the water and the Word in Baptism.

**WILKEN:** Now let’s talk about the Lord’s Supper, if we could. This is a passage from 1 Corinthians 10, a very familiar, kind of pre-Lord’s Supper passage. Paul’s working up toward his great admonition to the Corinthians about their misuse of the Lord’s Supper. Beginning at verse 15, from *The Message*.

**THE MESSAGE AUDIO CLIP:** I assume I’m addressing believers now, who are mature. Draw your own conclusions. When we drink the cup of blessing, aren’t we taking into ourselves the blood, the very life of Christ? And isn’t it the same with the loaf of bread we break and eat? Don’t we take into ourselves the body, the very life of Christ? Because there is one loaf, our many-ness becomes oneness. Christ doesn’t become fragmented in us. Rather, we become unified in Him. We don’t reduce Christ to what we are. He raises us to what He is.

**WILKEN:** Some real problems here, although they are quite subtle. And I want you to address the first one that pops out here, Dr. Steinmann, when he says – and it sounds good – “Don’t you take into yourself the very body?” And then he qualifies it: “the life of Christ.” What’s he doing there?

**STEINMANN:** Yeah, he’s denying that it’s the very body of Christ by saying, “What we mean by ‘body’ is just the life of Christ.” That somehow this isn’t, as St. Paul says, the very body of Christ that we’re taking in. And so since Peterson doesn’t believe that, he has to explain the body and the blood as taking in kind of “the life of Christ” metaphorically. In good Calvinist theology, of course, what you receive in the Lord’s

Supper is bread and wine, and by faith you somehow ascend to heaven and spiritually have the body and blood of Christ, but not actually in the bread and wine. And so that's what he's done – he's substituted that. And then this whole idea of taking into ourselves – that makes it, again, good Calvinist theology, because, of course, if I'm one of the elect, I do this kind of spiritual eating of Christ's body and blood, but not actual eating. But if I'm not one of the elect, of course that doesn't apply to me. But that's not what St. Paul says. He says when we come to the Lord's Supper, it's a participation in the body and blood of Christ. It doesn't matter whether you have faith or not, if you come there and do not have faith, you are still participating in the body and blood of Christ. And of course, this is very important and key to what Paul is going to say later on about the body and blood of Christ doing things, both for good, if you trust in it, or for ill, if you're not a believer when you come to the Lord's Supper. And so by denying this participation in the body of Christ – not just taking into yourself as an individual and doing something spiritual, but actual participation in the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper – by denying that, he's bringing in all of his theological presuppositions and throwing out the very language that St. Paul uses to teach what the Lord's Supper is.

**WILKEN:** And we'll get to this on the other side of the break – the next thing that Peterson does in that 1 Corinthians 10 passage is just make something up out of whole cloth, where he says, "We don't reduce Christ to what we are. He raises us to what He is." Sounds good, but that's not in the text *at all*. He just added a verse.

We'll be right back.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** Dr. Steinmann is our guest. We're critiquing Part 2 of our critique of *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, talking about

passages pertaining to Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Now, I realize, Dr. Steinmann, why it is – at least in the edition of *The Message* that I have in front of me – he doesn't versify every verse. He doesn't put a verse with every line. He does it in the margins, kind of in sections, and I realized why he does that. Because, at least in one case, in 1 Corinthians 10, after verse 17, he adds a verse that isn't in the text. He says, "We don't reduce Christ to what we are. He raises us to what He is." I looked at it. In the original, that ain't there at all. What's going on?

**STEINMANN:** Yeah. Well, again, it's his theological assumptions coming through. Again, a Calvinist theology. Christ doesn't come to us in His body and blood physically in the Sacrament in any way. Not under the bread and wine, but instead, we ascend to heaven to receive Christ spiritually. That's how John Calvin understood it, and that's how Presbyterians tend to understand it, because they tend to be Calvinists. And so he just puts that in there. Even though St. Paul never says anything like that, as far as I can tell, anywhere in any of his writings, much less right here in 1 Corinthians.

**WILKEN:** It is, if understood in its theological context as you've just said here, it is an explicit denial of the bodily presence of Christ in the Supper, isn't it?

**STEINMANN:** Absolutely. It couldn't be any clearer. And again, Lutherans and Presbyterians might have different readings of what St. Paul says. We might understand it differently. But an honest translation will put in what St. Paul says, and let the reader conclude on his or her study of Scripture what that means – rather than simply pasting in one sectarian view of what the Scriptures say.

**WILKEN:** Now, I wanted to spend a big chunk of time on the next Lord's Supper

passage, because it is a *sedes doctrinae*. It is actually a seed of doctrine. 1 Corinthians 11, beginning at verse 23. Here is what *The Message* says.

**THE MESSAGE AUDIO CLIP:** Let me go over with you again exactly what goes on in the Lord's Supper, and why it is so centrally important. I've received my instructions from the Master Himself, and pass them on to you. The Master Jesus, on the night of His betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me." After supper, He did the same thing with the cup. "This cup is my blood, my new covenant with you. Each time you drink this cup, remember me." What you must solemnly realize is that every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master. You will be drawn back to this meal again and again, until the Master returns. You must never let familiarity breed contempt. Anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Master irreverently is like part of the crowd that jeered and spit on Him at His death. Is that the kind of remembrance you want to be part of? Examine your motives. Test your heart. Come to this meal in holy awe.

**WILKEN:** All right. There's a lot there. Let's get started. He uses the words "broken for you," and then he even says – I think he actually substitutes the word "broken" for "given" in the original text. What's going on there?

**STEINMANN:** Yeah, well, again, since Peterson apparently does not believe in the presence of Christ's actual body in the bread, in the Sacrament, he has to make Jesus' action – I think he surely has in mind "Jesus took the bread and broke it," right? And so then "This is my body, broken for you." And it's the action of breaking which imitates Jesus' body, I guess, being broken and tortured on the cross, that is important

for him, because it can't actually *be* Jesus' body in the Sacrament. And so he has to make this tie between "broken" and "broken," even though St. Paul doesn't say He broke it and then said, "This is my body, broken for you," He says "given for you." And it's amazing to me that Peterson – and I've seen this all over this translation – where a writer will repeat the same word, or a word from the same root, and Peterson will change it. He won't – when there's supposed to be a connection between two things, he'll change it and you don't see the connection. Here, there's not supposed to be a connection, and he changes it so you think there's a connection between the action of breaking the bread and Jesus' body being broken on the cross. And so this just becomes symbolic, rather than the actual body of Christ.

**WILKEN:** Now, when it comes to the *verba*, to the actual words that Paul is quoting, he's quoting them verbatim from Christ in 1 Corinthians 11. How does Peterson do there?

**STEINMANN:** Not very well. He simply says, "This is what Jesus ought to have said, or what I think He really meant," rather than what Jesus said. If we go to the cup, "This cup is my new blood, my new covenant with you," is what Peterson says. That's not what Jesus says. Jesus says, "This cup *is* the New Testament in my blood." What Peterson has done is taking the blood – "This is my blood, my new covenant with you," meaning that it's not really Jesus' blood. What it is is a symbol of His covenant. But Jesus says, No, this cup *is* the new covenant in my blood." It doesn't symbolize the new covenant, it's not simply the new covenant; but it's the new covenant *in* Jesus' blood. This is very, very important. He's done a couple things here. He's denied that in the cup is the very blood of Christ, and he's really broken the connection of, I think, a very, very important connection with Jeremiah 31. Jeremiah 31 says – Jeremiah

prophesies that God will make a new covenant with His people. And what's that new covenant? "I will forgive their sins and remember their iniquities no more." And when Jesus says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood," He's basically saying, "Here's the fulfillment of the promise I made through Jeremiah." Here is the new covenant – and what's the new covenant? You are forgiven. And Jesus is saying, "You are forgiven in my blood, which is here in the cup." This is what is at the heart of the Sacrament, and it's been completely gutted by this subtle change.

**WILKEN:** Why do you take issue with his phrase, "What you must realize"?

**STEINMANN:** Well, it's not in the Greek, and there's a good reason that it's not in the Greek. The Eucharist is the proclamation of Christ's death, St. Paul says here. And Peterson says, "You must realize it's the proclamation of Christ's death." Whether we realize it or not when we come to the Lord's Supper, it *is* the proclamation of Jesus' death. If we come to the Supper sometimes without thinking about it, without contemplating on what we're doing or what is being done by the pastor, what is being done by God through the pastor, then it still *is*. It doesn't change the nature of the Sacrament by what we realize or don't realize. And that's just so very important, to realize that it's not our thoughts or actions that make the Lord's Supper the Lord's Supper. It's not our supper; it's the Lord's Supper. And what He does there is important. And so adding this "you must realize" that's not there in the Greek – he's, again, flipped it on its head.

**WILKEN:** And that's connected to another error he makes there, pretty egregious, where he says, "Whoever eats and drinks irreverently," rather than, as Paul says, "in an unworthy manner." What's the difference?

**STEINMANN:** Well, the whole point that Paul is making is "unworthy" has to do with faith. If you come trusting in the promise of God, you are worthy. It's not your outward reverence or what one society might think is a reverent act at the Supper – as opposed to what another society or person might think is reverent – it's not our outward act here. It is faith, planted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that makes us worthy to come. And St. Paul is talking about if you drink this unworthily, this is going to be a problem. Well, he's talking about whether we have faith in the heart, not whether we act reverently.

**WILKEN:** And Paul will say that unworthy eating and drinking makes one liable for the body and blood of the Lord. How does Peterson render that?

**STEINMANN:** He says, "You're like the crowd at Jesus' crucifixion, jeering and spitting on Him." And he misses the whole point. Again, this is part of spiritualizing this whole thing – that this is all a spiritual action; it's not what's actually happening, with the Word coming to the elements in the participation in the Lord's Supper. Instead of being guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, you've just made yourself kind of like those people that mocked Jesus at the foot of the cross. You can't really be guilty of physically misusing the body and blood of Christ. You're just kind of spiritually linked with those people.

**WILKEN:** Dr. Andrew Steinmann is our guest. Ten more minutes with him on this Friday, August the 10<sup>th</sup>, part 2 of our review of the Bible paraphrase, *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** In about fifteen minutes, in hour two of *Issues, Etc.* on this Friday afternoon, we're going to study the Lord's Supper hymn, "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent," with Dr. Arthur Just of Concordia

Theological Seminary. Looking forward to that second hour. In the meantime, part 2 of our review of the Bible paraphrase, *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson. Dr. Andrew Steinmann is our guest.

Well, so far, we've seen that when it comes to these key bell-weather passages in the New Testament, *The Message* falls very, very far short of the actual text. The last one that I wanted to look at with you has to do with the Office of the Keys, or Absolution, and it's John 20. This would take us to Easter evening, and verse 19. Here's what *The Message* says happened that night.

**THE MESSAGE AUDIO CLIP:** Later on that day, the disciples had gathered together, but, fearful of the Jews, had locked all the doors in the house. Jesus entered, stood among them and said, "Peace to you." Then He showed them His hands and side. The disciples, seeing the Master with their own eyes, were exuberant. Jesus repeated his greeting, "Peace to you. Just as the Father sent me, I send you." Then He took a deep breath and breathed into them. "Receive the Holy Spirit," he said. "If you forgive someone's sins, they're gone for good. If you don't forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?"

**WILKEN:** All right. That one actually has a few flags on the play that are subtle. It has a good stretch, and then it just explodes into a billion pieces. Let's talk about some of your concerns. What's the first one?

**STEINMANN:** Well, being a person on chronology, I don't understand why he has to go, "Later in the day," when the Bible says, "In the evening." Why he has to leave out the first day of the week, which John wants to emphasize again: this is Easter, the first day of the week. It's Sunday. So right away, it's kind of like the very heart of what is going on here, that this is an Easter proclamation by Jesus to His disciples, and then the Easter proclamation that the forgiveness of sins is now to be proclaimed

in absolution – it's just downplayed by leaving out the chronology. I have a real problem with that. Then in verse 20, he talks about "Jesus entered," instead of – the Greek says "came." And I don't know for sure, but I wonder if this is a Christological error. Again, the idea that Jesus could just come and be present there, bodily, even though all the doors are locked and it's shut up tight, somehow seems to be not quite in keeping with what Peterson and a lot of Calvinists want to believe. Jesus' body just can't go through walls or something. They kind of deny the real union between the divine and human in Jesus. And so He has to enter somehow. Some early Protestants taught that somehow, Jesus made a door somewhere that the disciples couldn't see and had to walk through it. This whole idea of "entered," although he may not have been thinking of this consciously when he chose to put "entered" instead of "came," seems to push in that direction. This is very important. Again, we just talked about the Lord's Supper. Differences in what we believe about Jesus and the relationship between Jesus' two natures, divine and human, come out in the Lord's Supper. And I think they also come out here in Absolution in some ways.

**WILKEN:** I've had the same gut reaction to the word "entered." And he's all about making it in language that people understand today, and the way that people understand it today. "Entered" strongly implies, in modern usage, that He entered by some ordinary means, and I think the point that John is trying to make with locked doors and "Jesus came" is that He *didn't* do that. Precisely.

**STEINMANN:** Yeah. I really think it's a Christological error, although I don't think he was thinking consciously about Christology when he chose that word.

**WILKEN:** Now, the real problem comes here with the words of Christ whereby He

both institutes and makes the promise of the forgiveness of sins, carried out in the Office of the Keys – where He authorizes the disciples to absolve sins. What mistakes does Peterson make here?

**STEINMANN:** Well, he has Jesus saying, “When you forgive someone their sins, they’re gone for good.” The Greek definitely says, “When you forgive, they are forgiven.” It’s forgive, forgiven – in both parts this root “forgive.” “Gone for good” is not necessarily wrong, but I wonder if he’s uncomfortable with the idea that humans, like pastors, can actually forgive sins. Jesus gives them that authority. And that’s what He’s doing here with His disciples. He’s giving them the authority to speak in His name to forgive sins. And I think he’s uncomfortable with that whole idea – that it really happens. And just like it’s really Jesus’ body and blood in the Sacrament, it’s really forgiveness of sins in Baptism, here is it really forgiveness of sins in Absolution, or is it just some announcement and you receive that again by the faith apart from the actual pronouncement of forgiveness? But that’s exactly what Jesus says. When you forgive, *they are forgiven* – that you actually have that authority. And by getting rid of that forgiven language to match the “forgive” earlier, he’s kind of severed the two.

**WILKEN:** And then the next thing, which would be accurately rendered, “Whatever sins you retain, they are retained” – that would be the parallel there. Peterson is obviously, as you’ve said several times here, uncomfortable with what Jesus said, so he just substitutes what he thinks Jesus should have said, where he says – what does he say? “If you hold onto them...”

**STEINMANN:** “If you don’t forgive them, what are you going to do with them?”

**WILKEN:** That’s a whole different thing than Jesus is saying, isn’t it?

**STEINMANN:** Yeah, it’s kind of like a petulant parent. “What am I going to do with these sinning kids?” But that’s not what Jesus is saying. The Greek use the word “to hold on to, to grasp.” If you hold on to the sins, they’re held. They are held back, they are retained, they are not forgiven. And if he’s uncomfortable with humans forgiving sin, he’s even more, I think, uncomfortable with the idea that a pastor might have to look somebody in the eye and say, “If you do not repent, you will not be forgiven.” But that’s exactly what pastors have to do. And sometimes that’s also what good parents have to tell their children. It’s what Christians do with one another when we get caught up in our sin and do not want to repent. We need to be told there’s a Law side to this as well as a Gospel side. And I get the idea with Peterson, he’s somewhat comfortable with the Gospel, but he’s really not comfortable at all with the Law. In fact, my colleague John Rhodes and I were looking at some other passages in *The Message* yesterday afternoon, where St. Paul talks about sins. And [Peterson] completely downplays certain sins. He’s just not comfortable with the idea that God condemns sins, or in this case, that God empowers His people.

**WILKEN:** Here’s my kind of overarching concern about *The Message*, really even more than any other paraphrase, because it seems more egregious than other paraphrases that try and do a good, honest job of paraphrasing. My concern is, if you use this – and some pastors do, notably Rick Warren – as the main source of teaching and preaching, not only are you unlikely to get a Biblical teaching on the Lord’s Supper, Baptism, or Absolution out of *The Message*, you’re not going to be *able* to get a Biblical teaching on those things. Because he guts those passages. You’re not going to be able to teach what the Bible teaches if you use *The Message* on those subjects. Your thoughts?

**STEINMANN:** Yeah, and that's very, very important, because – I suppose you've had the same experience, or similar experience, that I've had when I was a parish pastor. I've had people come to me, once they hear the Gospel proclaimed in the congregation where I was, and want to become members, and I find out they used to be members of some Protestant church. And those Protestant churches clearly did not teach, for instance, that the body and blood of Jesus was in the Sacrament. But those people heard the Word of God, and they learned from me what their former churches actually taught. They heard the Word of God, "This is my body, this is my blood," and they just believed it. They thought that that's what was going on in the Sacrament. And it wasn't until they came to me and I said, "Your former Presbyterian church officially teaches that's not what's happening," or "Your Baptist church teaches that's not what's happening." And by using this, they can't – you're putting an obstruction in the way of the Holy Spirit working faith in the simple words of Scripture. It's not hard to understand "This is my body, this is my blood." I understand for some people, it's hard to accept, but it's not hard to understand.

**WILKEN:** We have only 30 seconds here. Do we need paraphrases? Is the average parishioner well-instructed, able to understand an honest translation, word for

word, as close as we can get, of the original language, when reading the Bible? 30 seconds.

**STEINMANN:** Yeah, a good, honest translation. And they come in different levels. But a good, honest translation that's pitched at the right level – very good. You don't need these to make it simpler. Overall, I don't really think it's simpler. I think it's just more wordy, it's sometimes doctrine that's not in the Scripture itself, and sometimes, I think it's even more confusing. So I don't know why you would want to use this. It's, in some sense, easier reading, but I'm not sure it's any easier to understand.

**WILKEN:** Dr. Andrew Steinmann is Professor of Theology & Hebrew at Concordia University Chicago, author of the Concordia Commentaries on *Daniel*, *Proverbs*, and *Ezra & Nehemiah*, and the book *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*.

Dr. Steinmann, thanks for being our guest.

**STEINMANN:** Thank you, Todd.

**WILKEN:** We do not need to be afraid of the original language. This is what I find problematic about Peterson's entire premise: he presupposes that the Holy Spirit wasn't competent enough to choose the right words to communicate God's Word. Guess what? He was. He still is.

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