

Scripture Twisters (2 Peter 3:14-18)

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13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. 17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Introduction

Peter believes the Scriptures play a vital role in the life of the Christian (see 1 Peter 1:22-2:3; 2:8; 3:1; 2 Peter 1:3-4, 12-21; 2:21; 3:1-7, 14-18). And he does not cease challenging us to turn our attention to the Scriptures. Even while Peter points us to the Word, he warns that some will seek to turn us from the truths of the Scriptures by perverting the teaching of Scripture. He does not look for false prophets to arise, apparently because prophets are no longer necessary. After all, God has spoken fully and finally in Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:1-4). But he does warn us false teachers will arise. They may not claim to reveal new truth from God on the level of Scripture, but they will seek to distort the Scriptures, twisting them to teach something vastly different from the intended meaning of the Bible.

In these closing verses of his second epistle, Peter draws our attention one final time to the Scriptures and the crucial role they play in our lives. He wants us to know that Paul's letters are part of the inspired Word of God and that Paul is not one of the false teachers, although some distort his words to mean something far from what he intended. If Paul is blamed for teaching error, Peter wants his readers to know Paul is not the one at fault. Paul's teaching is in agreement with the revelation God gave through the Old Testament prophets, with the teaching of our Lord, and with the writings of the other apostles.

We sometimes hear someone say, "Your interpretation of Scripture is but one of many interpretations." If we want to convince someone our interpretation of the Scriptures is correct, they might respond that the Bible is capable of meaning whatever one wants it to mean. This, of course, could be said of any writing.

We must not wrongly conclude that men's failure to interpret Scripture accurately proves God did not clearly reveal Himself and His message to men in the Bible. Neither is it true that the meaning of Scripture is so obscure it is virtually impossible to discern.⁷⁸ [There is one correct interpretation of Scripture, and the rest is often the result of Scripture twisting, whether intentional or not.](#)

Our purpose in this concluding lesson of Second Peter is to note the characteristics of Scripture twisters so we may be alert to their presence among us. Further, we will identify the most common ways men twist the meaning of Scripture to help us avoid those errors in our study and interpretation of the Bible. In this way, we will be able to sharpen our interpretive skills and "accurately handle the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

What We Should Know About Scripture Twisters

From Peter's warnings in his epistles and what we are told elsewhere in Scripture, we can summarize what we should know about Scripture twisters:

(1) We should expect Scripture twisters to arise within the church. We can expect to arise from within the church those who will twist the meaning of Scriptures as they interpret, apply, and teach the Bible. Peter warns us concerning false teachers in chapter 2, verse 1. Paul warns of the same danger in Acts 20:30. False teachers will arise from among the saints, twisting the truths of God's Word and thus leading some astray.

(2) We should also know the most likely areas for error to be introduced. Peter informs us that Scripture twisters deny a coming day of judgment (3:1-4), even though their judgment is sure (2:1, 3, 9, 12, 17). It would seem from 2 Peter 2:1 that Scripture twisters twist the Scriptures concerning the person and the work of Jesus Christ in that they "deny the Master who bought them." In addition, Scripture twisters undermine the Biblical teaching on holy living (2 Peter 2:2; contrast 3:11, 14).

(3) Those who twist Scripture will twist any or all of the Bible, but they will often base their teachings on an obscure or problematic text. Peter acknowledges that some of Paul's writings are "difficult to understand" (verse 16). These seem to be the starting point for the truth twisters. They begin with a problematic passage, developing their unorthodox doctrines, and then turn to the clear, emphatic texts, denying what they dogmatically teach.

False teachers do not stop with Paul's writings but distort the Scriptures as a whole. Problem passages written by Paul are only the tip of the iceberg. These perverters of Scripture do not stop here; they are not content unless they have twisted "the rest of the Scriptures" as well. Since the Scriptures agree, then one who sets aside the teaching of one author must, to be consistent, set aside other texts as well.

(4) Those who twist Scripture are described by Peter as "untaught and unstable." The term "untaught" is rendered "ignorant" by the translators of the King James Version. The two terms "untaught" and "unstable" are introduced by a common article. This seems to indicate these two terms are to be viewed as interrelated. Like "love and marriage," these terms go together "like a horse and carriage." In other words, those who are "untaught" are "unstable," and those who are "unstable" are also "untaught."

In the Book of Ephesians, Paul emphasizes the other side of Peter's words. Paul indicates the one who is stable is the one well-taught in the Scriptures. Both James and Peter make closely related statements:

11 And He gave some [as] apostles, and some [as] prophets, and some [as] evangelists, and some [as] pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all [aspect] into Him

clarity in doctrinal teaching, 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all [aspects] into him, who is the head, [even] Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. 17 This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, (Ephesians 4:11-17).

5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 [being] a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:5-8).

8 For if these [qualities] are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these [qualities] is blind [or] short-sighted, having forgotten [his] purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (2 Peter 1:8-11).

(5) Scripture twisters have ulterior motives which are far from pure. The teachings of the Scripture twisters is self-serving and often rooted in greed and the desire for monetary gain (Titus 1:11; Jude 11, 16; contrast Acts 20:33; 1 Thessalonians 2:5-6; 1 Timothy 3:3; 6:3-5). For some, their twisted teaching is rooted in the ambition to have a personal following (Acts 20:30). Then there are those who twist Scripture to indulge their fleshly lusts (Titus 1:10-16; 2 Peter 2:10-22; Jude 18). Their approach to Scripture is not at all like that of David:

17 Deal bountifully with Thy servant, That I may live and keep Thy word. 18 Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Thy law (Psalms 119:17-18).

Instead, they are "following after their own lusts" (2:3). They exploit their victims out of greed (2:3) and not out of a genuine love and concern (see 2 Peter 1:12-15; 1 Thessalonians 2:3-12).

(6) The appeal of Scripture twisters is in providing a pretext for self-indulgence and sin for their followers, as well as themselves. They entice those who are immature and vulnerable (2 Peter 2:14, 18; see 2 Timothy 3:6-7). While teachers of biblical truth call for the saints to "abstain from fleshly lusts" (Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:16, 24; 1 Peter 2:11), Scripture twisters assure men Christians can indulge the flesh (Jude 4) with no consequences.

(7) Those who twist Scripture may include both teachers (Romans 1:18-32; 2 Timothy 3:8, 13) and their pupils (verse 16; 2 Timothy 3:6-7; 2 Peter 2:14). While the context of chapters 2 and 3 is false teachers, Peter's words in verse 16 should not be restricted only to false teachers but to any who are "untaught" and "unstable," who wish to justify their ungodly conduct.

(8) Those who twist Scripture do so to their own destruction (verse 16; see also John 5:39; Acts 5:20; Romans 2:7-8; Philippians 2:16; contrast 1 Timothy 4:16). It is little wonder that Scripture twisters deny the second coming of our Lord and the judgment to come. After all, His coming is a day of judgment for them. But Peter's teaching is clear. Those who distort the truth of God's Word do so to their own destruction (3:16; see also 2:1, 3, 9-13, 20-22; 3:7).

Sharpening our Sensitivity to Scripture Twisters

Peter's words are written so Christians will be on their guard, alert to those who twist the Scriptures. He expects the saints not only can, but should, be able to discern those who pervert God's Word. Peter is not speaking only to church leaders or Bible teachers here; he is speaking to all the saints. Every Christian should be able to recognize those about whom Peter warns us. Peter indicates how Christians can be prepared to spot false teachers and turn from them:

17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him [be] the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (2 Peter 3:17-18).

The *first* thing necessary is for us to realize we have been forewarned that Scripture twisters are going to arise. They will arise not only from without but from within. Peter warns of the false teachers "among you" (2:1, see also 2:3, 13). Paul warns the Ephesian elders that some of them will depart from the truth, twisting the Scriptures:

28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build [you] up and to give [you] the inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:28-32).

We must therefore be like the Bereans, always putting the teaching of others (even those whom we respect) to the test. Does the teaching we receive square with the truths of God's Word (see Acts 17:11)? Bible teaching must never be a substitute for our own personal study of the Word of God; it is an enhancement to our own study. Good teaching should only encourage and facilitate the personal study of God's Word, never discourage it.

Second, the best preventative for false teaching by others is to actively pursue godliness and personal spiritual growth:

17b Be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:17b-18).

These words sound very much like the words Peter began his teaching with in chapter 1:

5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in [your] moral excellence, knowledge; 6 and in [your] knowledge, self-control, and in [your] self-control, perseverance, and in [your] perseverance, godliness; 7 and in [your] godliness, brotherly kindness, and in [your] brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these [qualities] are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the

true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these [qualities] is blind [or] short-sighted, having forgotten [his] purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble (2 Peter 1:5-10).

Those who do not know God personally through faith in Jesus Christ are not able to comprehend the truths of God's Word:

43 "Why do you not understand what I am saying? [It is] because you cannot hear My word. 44 "You are of [your] father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own [nature;] for he is a liar, and the father of lies. 45 "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me" (John 8:43-45; see also 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; 1 Corinthians 2:14).

Those who know God, and who desire to do His will, will be enabled to understand divine truth:

16 Jesus therefore answered them, and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 17 If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or [whether] I speak from Myself. 18 He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him" (John 7:16-18).

Those whose walk with the Lord is stagnant are most vulnerable to false teaching. The teaching of God's Word should cause the slothful saint to be uneasy. The twisting of Scripture is what the wayward saint will feel comfortable hearing. Spiritual health is the best preventative for the disease of Scripture twisting.

12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. 14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession (Hebrews 4:12-14).

Very closely related to what we are learning here is the personal pursuit of holiness, for pursuing holiness greatly contributes to our ability to discern and avoid Scripture twisters. It is precisely when we are "following our own lusts" that we will seek to distort the truth of the Word of God (2:3) to fit our desires. Those who are dominated by their lusts are the false teachers (2:10-22). Those who pursue holiness will discern those who lead unholy lives who encourage others to follow them. And so it is that Peter urges his readers to pursue godliness in the same text he warns us of Scripture twisters:

14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless (2 Peter 3:14).

Levels of Error

Not all errors are alike. Some errors are more dangerous and even more culpable than others. Some errors stem from ignorance. We simply do not know the Scriptures well enough. It may be that we speculate where we should simply acknowledge our ignorance (see Deuteronomy 29:29) and study the Word to determine the truth. Some errors are errors of personal opinion or belief. For example, Christians may differ over the interpretation of a particular passage, especially a problematic passage. Everyone cannot be right. Perhaps no one is right. So long as we identify our interpretation as our opinion, I do not think we are in trouble. But when we teach our opinion as absolute truth, we are venturing into dangerous waters.

We need to distinguish between our convictions, which we should not impose on others, and the teaching of God's principles and commands which all are to accept and practice. Paul is very careful to indicate to his readers those matters which are his personal conviction and those which are not. We see this in 1 Corinthians 7. His conviction and practice is that he can better serve the Lord unmarried than married (1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 25-28). He does not, however, like some false teachers, condemn marriage altogether (see 1 Timothy 4:3). He simply points out that marriage can be a distraction and challenges us to consider the single life as an option. We should learn to recognize the difference between our own personal convictions (which we are told to keep to ourselves [Romans 14:22] and those truths which all Christians must embrace to be orthodox. The virgin birth of our Lord, for example, should not be considered a personal conviction but a doctrinal fundamental of the faith. Those doctrinal truths which are an essential part of the gospel are crucial to the gospel. When these truths are twisted, incalculable damage can be done, not only to ourselves but to others.

I believe we should distinguish between those errors we sincerely hold as personal opinion or conviction and those we teach and advocate to others as God's truth. Once we take on the role of teacher, we assume responsibility not only for ourselves, but for others, which is an awesome thing. No wonder James admonishes us that not many should become teachers (James 4:1). Those things we teach others as the command of Christ become matters of great importance, and if we err on this level, we err seriously, to our own shipwreck and that of any who follow us in our error. We should also beware of teaching in such a way as to set aside or undermine what God has given to His people as a clear command. We are told by our Lord to teach believers all that He has commanded us (Matthew 28:18-20), so let us see that the commands of Christ are the curriculum of discipleship. To fail to teach these, or to teach them in error, is very serious business.

Ways We Twist Scripture

It is very clear in Peter's epistles (and also Paul's) that the Scriptures are of primary importance to the Christian. Nothing is more dangerous than twisting the truth of God's Word. I would like to suggest some ways Peter's words relate to us and how the Scriptures are being perverted in our time, even within evangelicalism.

(1) We err greatly in our interpretation and application of God's Word when we subordinate the revelation of God's truth to our own reason. When God's command is clear, it does not matter nearly so much that we understand why the command is given as that we obey it. Too many Christians refuse to believe or obey Scripture until it makes sense to them. Some think Christians should understand the "full depth of injury" that others have brought upon them before they forgive them. I understand the Bible teaches us to forgive to whatever degree we perceive someone has offended us at that moment and grant further forgiveness if and when it is required.

Adam and Eve did not understand why God forbade them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They did not need to know this. In fact, eating of the tree is what would give them this knowledge. All they needed to know was that God had given this command and then to obey it. More faith is required to obey God when we don't understand why than to obey when the reasons are glaring us in the face. All too often I hear

when we don't understand why them to obey, when the reasons are glaring as in the case of all too often I hear Christians refusing to believe or obey God's Word at a point where they fail to grasp the reasons for it. I would remind you that many of the distinctions between "clean" and "unclean" in the Old Testament seem to have no reason, except that God declared them to be such. The question is whether we will accept God's distinction between good and evil, clean and unclean, truth and error. In the armed forces, boot camp is intended to teach recruits to obey their leaders, without question, and without the need to first know why. It is not we who have been called to pass judgment on the Word of God, but the Word of God which is to judge and to guide us.

(2) We are on very dangerous ground when we seek to "integrate" God's truth, as revealed in Scripture, with "man's truth," as currently understood and taught from outside the Scriptures. "All truth is God's truth," we are told. That statement has a dangerous tendency, as currently applied. It tends to put all "truth" on the same level. It suggests that what is currently believed to be "true" through science, for example, is just as surely true as the truths of the Bible. It suggests that such scientific truth is just as certainly true as biblical truth. It suggests that secular "truth," as currently understood, is just as important and as necessary to apply as God's truth.

I do not believe this to be true. **Only God's truth—the truth God has revealed in His Word—is true truth,** that which we can be assured is truth. Scientific truths continue to change. Biblical truth never changes. How sad to see Christians rushing back to the Scriptures to reinterpret them because modern science has apparently exposed some new truth which challenges God's truth as taught in his Word. How sad to hear Christians who are alleged experts in some secular field proclaim these "truths" on the same level as the truth of God's Word. Now the Bible is often not the primary text, the primary source of truth, but a secondary source. The Bible is used to illustrate or proof text what the secular sciences have identified as truth.

The Bible is the only revelation of truth which is inspired, inerrant, and infallible. The Bible reveals every truth essential for life and godliness. It is not God's truth (as revealed in Scripture), plus other "truth," which we need to live godly lives; it is God's truth alone. Any truth not found in God's truth is subordinate to God's truth, and it is secondary to God's truth, if indeed it is true at all. No wonder Christians are reading so many books beside (and often in place of) the Bible. They think they will find truth which is more necessary and important there. They are wrong. If any book is of great value to the Christian, it will be one which turns our attention and allegiance back to *the Book*.

(3) We twist the Scriptures when we "strain gnats and swallow camels." This error was practiced by the scribes and Pharisees. They made much of the little details of the Scriptures, but they missed the main point. They put much emphasis on the specific commands of the Law but failed to grasp the major principles like justice and mercy, matters about which the prophets spoke. And so it was that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus interpreted the Law in such a way as to get to the heart of the Law. The Law not only prohibits murder, it requires us to deal with hatred by granting or seeking forgiveness. The Law not only prohibits immorality, it teaches us to deal with impure thoughts as sin. This is the reason David loved the Law of God and meditated upon it (see Psalm 119). The Law teaches us the principles of life and reveals to us the character and the heart of God. When we spiritualize the Scriptures, causing them to teach what they do not, we are beginning to twist the Scriptures.

(4) We twist the Scriptures when we take them farther than they were intended to be interpreted or applied. The Judaizers of Paul's day took the command to be circumcised and imposed it upon the Gentiles, insisting they must do so to be saved (cf. Acts 15:1-2). When we teach our own ideas and doctrines (which are not in Scripture) as though they were Scriptural truth, we go too far, twisting Scripture. Paul warned us about this very thing, for it was the cause of division and destruction in Corinth:

6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Sometimes we twist the Scriptures by over-spiritualizing the text, interpreting its message to be something far beyond what the text itself teaches or requires. Whether in the interpretation or in the application of God's Word, we must not go beyond what is written.

(5) We twist the Scriptures when we accommodate our own culture in the interpretation and application of God's Word. In its most blatant form, we find the Scriptures to be in error or invalid when our cultural values differ from what they teach. And so it is that some have set aside Paul's teaching on the role women are to play in the church. Now, we ordain women as pastors and as overseers. We look down upon Paul for being a chauvinist. And in matters which are sensitive, we either play down or remain silent if the Scriptures collide with culture. And so the sin of homosexuality is no longer called sin and condemned as such. To do so would require that we exercise discipline on those who practice what God condemns. In order to have large, "successful," happy churches, we do not hold to the same standards of marriage and divorce our Lord did. To do so would be to alienate and offend some and reduce church roles and budgets.

(6) We twist the Scriptures when we isolate the teaching of one part of the Bible from the teaching of the rest of the Bible. We will distort the message of the Bible when we fail to harmonize a particular Scripture with other Scripture. The cults selectively use the Scriptures. Paul tells the Ephesian elders that he taught the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 27), and not just selected portions or truths. For example, some will distort the biblical teaching on prayer by making this promise their theme:

19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 18:19).

The fact that this promise is contained in a context dealing with church discipline is ignored. And the fact that other criteria and requirements also apply to prayer is also nicely avoided, texts such as this one:

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend [it] on your pleasures (James 4:3).

A husband and wife may agree they would like to own a mansion in Hawaii, but just because they agree in prayer does not obligate God to give them one. If we would pray as we ought, then we will pray in accordance with all the Bible teaches on prayer, not just on the basis of one isolated text, true though it is.

Quite frankly, this is the way most Christians read and study their Bibles, in tiny segments, often in random sequence. Most daily devotional books are written in this manner. But this fails to incline us to read a whole book at a time and attempt to ingest large doses of Scripture. Let us seek to read God's Word more often, in greater portions, and in sequence.

(7) We twist the Scriptures when we fail to hold seminalv contradictory truths in tension. We like to

have our truth in neat little packages, all nicely labeled and easy to keep separated. And so we, like the Pharisees of old, want truth to be one way or the other, but not both:

16 And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. 17 Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" (Matthew 22:16-17).

They wanted Jesus to tell them they should pay their taxes or they should not. They were trying to press Jesus into saying men should either obey Caesar or obey God. Either way, they could get Jesus in trouble. Jesus told them they should submit to God and to Caesar. They couldn't have it all one way.

Truths must be held in tension. God is sovereign. Nothing happens that is not a part of His sovereign decree. Yet we have been commanded to do certain things. We are humanly responsible for our decisions and actions. These two truths, the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man, are both true and must be held in tension. Those who would seek to hold one truth and deny the other will distort the Scriptures.

Some of the teachings of Scripture which appeared contradictory were also held in tension by the saints of old and now can be seen in a clearer light. The truth of the deity of Christ was taught in the Old Testament, and now in the New, as is also the truth of His humanity. These truths appeared contradictory, but in the incarnation we see they were not. Even now we do not fully understand this union of humanity and deity, but we believe it, by faith. Still there are those who cling to one and reject the other.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of the suffering of Christ, and they also foretold of His glorious reign. The prophets themselves agonized as to how they might harmonize these two truths in tension (1 Peter 1:10-12), but they held to both. Now, in the light of the two comings of Christ, we understand there is no contradiction. Let us not reject one biblical truth (often the one we like the least) in a futile effort to remove the tension it creates with another truth.

(8) We twist the Scriptures by privately interpreting them (2 Peter 1:20-21). Over the years I have observed many of these "independent" Bible students. In truth, they are arrogant and unteachable. The irony is they often are eager to teach others, and they often can be found attempting to straighten out the church. Peter teaches us that the Scriptures were not only inspired by the Holy Spirit, they are to be interpreted by the illumination of the Spirit. Why is it that the church at Antioch (and, in my opinion, most healthy churches) have more than one gifted teacher?

The truth of God is for the people of God. If my understanding of a passage fails to fall within the mainline of conservative, evangelical teaching over the history of the church, then my view is suspect:

36 Was it from you that the word of God [first] went forth? Or has it come to you only? (1 Corinthians 14:36).

Those who have suffered and died for their faith and for the purity of biblical doctrine should not be ignored. Other gifted teachers should not be ignored. There is no place for individual autonomy in the Christian life. Those who think they can interpret the Scriptures on their own, disregarding all others, are highly suspect in their interpretation and clearly wrong in their attitude.

Often, such people will (ab)use this verse as a pretext for their independence:

26 These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. 27 And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him (1 John 2:26-27).

Notice first of all that the context here is false teachers. These teachers are those, like many cultists today, who come to your door and try to confuse you about what you believe. They represent themselves as "experts" (who think they know the "original Greek" or whatever). They offer to teach a Bible study in your home. They are those who raise doubts about your ability to read the Word of God and understand its message. *Let no teacher keep you from a personal study of the Word. And do not give an ear to any false teacher. A true teacher of the Word is one who stimulates you to study the Word of God and to find out if what he teaches is indeed from God. Such teachers do not use clever or manipulative techniques but rely upon the Spirit of God to convince you of what is true—from the Scriptures:*

11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily**, [to see] whether these things were so (Acts 17:11 emphasis mine).

4 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

True teachers of the Word of God do not create a reliance on themselves but a reliance on the Word of God:

32 "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build [you] up and to give [you] the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

(9) We twist the Scriptures by the misappropriation of truth. Grace is now distorted to sanctify sin. Grace is our excuse for sin, rather than an escape from sin. Sovereignty is an excuse for inactivity and passivity, etc. The Scriptures are twisted to excuse sin rather than expose and eradicate it.

(10) We twist the Scriptures when we selectively deny biblical teachings or commands. Sometimes this is a bold, outright denial of the truth of God's Word. Satan did this in relation to God's warning that if Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit they would die (see Genesis 3:4). The false teachers of Peter's day did this in relation to the second coming of Christ (2 Peter 3:3-4). We do it by setting certain Scriptures aside, not by denying their truth, but by denying their application to us. Some try to set aside the teaching of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount by dispensationalizing it, telling us this is truth for the kingdom and thus not directly applicable to us. Some set aside Paul's teachings (not to mention Peter's) on the conduct of women by telling us these teachings were for a different time and a different culture. In His Great Commission, Jesus instructed the church to make disciples by "*teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:20). How many of our Lord's commandments, as recorded in the Gospels, are taken seriously today, by evangelical, conservative Christians? By you?

Many of the teachings and commands of the Bible are set aside by default—we simply are ignorant of them because we have not read or studied God's Word. Ignorance is not bliss, and we will be held accountable for

because we have not read or studied God's Word. Ignorance is not bliss, and we will be held accountable for knowing and doing what God has commanded in His Word.

Conclusion

Peter knows he is soon to die. Knowing this, he is intent on calling his readers to continually remember and apply the truths of God's Word (2 Peter 1:13-15). In this Peter is in agreement with the other apostles, like Paul (see Acts 20:17-35; 1 Timothy 4:1-16; 6:1-5, 20-21; 2 Timothy 3:1-4:8). No wonder Peter wishes his readers to know he endorses Paul's writings as the inspired Word of God! How much nearer we are to the day of our Lord's return. And how many are those who seek to twist the Scriptures to their destruction and, if possible, ours. Let us be men and women of the Word.

Let us be on guard against error and be reminded that false teachers will not only arise from without but from within the church. It is the task of leaders to protect the flock from error, but it is also true that error may come from within the leaders (see Matthew 23; Acts 20:28-32). When we look only to our leaders to discern the truth and tell us what is biblical, what is right and wrong, when our leaders go astray, we are in trouble because we blindly follow them. This is what has and is taking place in many denominations. *We are individually responsible to discern error and to respond to it biblically.*

As the last days approach, let us fix our hope on the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us seek to live holy lives, so that we practice and proclaim the excellencies of God before a godless world. May we be men and women of the Word, encouraged in our study of the Bible by faithful teachers and turning from those who are false. May we not be guilty of twisting the Scriptures in our own study, but, like David, turning to the Word of God to know God and to live lives which are pleasing in His sight.

78 I am speaking with regard to the meaning of Scripture in areas of major Bible doctrines and truths and not with regard to the problematic areas where the Scriptures are either silent or unclear (see Deuteronomy 29:29).