

TWISTING SCRIPTURE?

Ever twisted your ankle? It can be incapacitating. You experience pain and ineffectiveness. Things don't work. The same happens when people mis-use the Bible by twisting what it says. Peter closes his second letter with encouragement and warning. And an appeal to be diligent in the Christian life, all according to the authority of Scripture. 2Peter 3:15-16 says, "*Just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*" Let's look at four aspects.

1- The authority of Scripture. Peter regards Paul as a fellow apostle, called by the Lord Jesus Himself, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak and write the very words of God, just as Jesus had promised in John 14. Peter's letter warns against false prophets and teachers who merely claim special knowledge, in contrast to God's messengers of truth who "*impart in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit*" (1Corinthians 2:13). And 2Peter 2:16-21 explains how God communicates His words through human authors, as "*men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*"

Paul's calling to apostleship is recorded in Acts 9, and in Acts 15 he is recognized by the gathered church and the other apostles, as having God's calling to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. God, not men, conferred apostleship on Paul. As in Romans 1:1 "*called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God*" and Galatians 1:1, "*an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father.*" The apostle Paul wrote most of the New Testament, and Peter is familiar with his writings. They are consistent with the Spirit-inspired words of all of the other human authors of the New Testament.

2- Things hard to understand. Peter is so familiar with Paul's writings that he says of them, "*there are some things in them that are hard to understand.*" So if you struggle with some of Paul's writings, you are in good company. However, Peter likely understood them quite well, even as he likely understood the Old Testament better than most of us today, since he too was a student of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Peter himself wrote two very impressive letters, though he was relatively unlearned in the formal sense.

Paul was a pre-eminent rabbi of his day, up and coming, taught by the best teachers. Even today the apostle Paul is regarded as one of the most brilliant minds ever produced. And note that Peter said "*some things*" not all things, are hard to understand. This can be especially true regarding future things, which is the immediate context of Peter's comment, regarding being diligent to live live holy lives now in light of coming judgment. As scholars note, the Bible is so simple that a child can grasp the good news about salvation, but so complex that all the scholars put together will never plumb its depths regarding the truth of God and salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, Peter's warning about counterfeit teachers.

3- Twist to your own destruction. Some Scripture may be difficult to understand, but mis-using it does not make it more clear. Peter says "*the ignorant and unstable twist*" Scriptures "*to their own destruction.*" The ignorant are the unlearned and false teachers and their converts who do not know the truth. Paul also talked about false teachers, as in 2Timothy 3:7, as "*always learning but never coming to knowledge of the truth.*" The unstable are those unestablished in truth, as Ephesians 4:14, "*tossed by every wind of doctrine.*" To twist Scripture can involve turning the meaning ever so slightly or quite a bit. Half-truths or 1/1024th truths are not true truth. Jesus called Satan "*the father of lies.*" Satan in Genesis 3 hissed, "*did God really say?*" Satan twisted Scripture in Matthew 4 during the temptation of Jesus, and each time Jesus replied with the truth of Scripture - as we are to do, trusting and obeying what God wrote.

Hebrews 5:11, "*we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. Everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*" An echo of Romans 12:1-2. Spiritual maturity isn't measured on a calendar. Rather, you "know to grow" as you trust and obey what God has written down. As AW Tozer said, "whatever keeps me from my Bible is my enemy, however harmless it may be."

4- Consider the consequences. Don't think of twisting Scripture as simple harmless mistakes. Peter and Paul explain errors in doctrine as not benign but malignant, with deathly consequences. Twisting the Bible can lead to destruction, both earthly and eternal. God is truth. That's why He hates falsehood, and why the Bible says false teachers are destined for fiery judgment. In contrast, God's messengers present the whole counsel of God. As Tozer said, "We must not select a few favorite passages to the exclusion of others. Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian." Read your Bible every day! ☐