

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Biblical Truth Vs. Twisted Interpretations

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:15–18, KJV 1900)

Drive along the common city street and take note of the many facilities with the name of some church on the facility's sign. If you take the time to investigate each of the groups that meet in those facilities, you will discover that most of them all claim to believe and to teach from the Bible. However, when you compare their teachings, you will discover a confusing array of diverse ideas and teachings. The confusion leads one to question, "Are they all using the same Bible?" In some cases, they are not. One need only spend a little time with the many books available under the title "Holy Bible" to discover that they are not at all the same, either in reading or in their teaching content. While diverse editions of the Bible explain some of the differences between all of these "Churches," it does not explain them all.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century and flourishing through the twentieth, Christianity was inundated with one new and supposedly better edition (I hesitate to classify them as a translation, for many of them were not compiled at all as a true translation of the manuscripts of Scripture into English) than the last. Simultaneous with this flood of new editions of the Bible came a new (In fact more "New Age" and "Gnostic" than "new") perspective of how people read the Bible. Instead of viewing one translation and the actual words of Scripture as one's final authority for faith and conduct, people started thinking they could read all the various editions of the Bible and draw their own private conclusions by mixing them all and believing what they personally liked out of the mix. Thus, human preference supplanted Scripture alone as the final authority for truth. In this culture, a private gnostic, New Age relativistic idea replaced a respectful view of Scripture as the believer's one and final authority.

Add to this confusion the egotistical penchant among many professing Christians to view their own private interpretations as equal to inspired Scripture, however twisted when compared to historical Christianity's teachings and the dominant view of historical Christians regarding a passage. The New Testament emphasizes that the Lord's

church is the pillar and ground of truth, not any one believer's private opinion or twisted interpretation of a passage.

Our study passage reminds us that private opinions and interpretations of Scripture didn't begin a hundred or so years ago. It has always been a factor. It may appear subtle at first glance, but the idea that my private interpretation of a verse of Scripture is just as absolutely true and just as binding as the verse itself is wholly alien to Scripture's teachings. This idea will typically either wholly ignore or wholly devalue the Biblical emphasis on the church as God's appointed pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15) In fact, the person who holds this view has magnified his own presumed intellect above Scripture itself, as well as above all believers who went before him and left their record of faith for subsequent generations of believers. Self, one's personal opinion about a passage, is no better than "Bad News for Modern Man." It contradicts Scripture's affirmation of the true "...pillar and ground of the truth." Will churches err? Indeed they shall, as the confusing array of different churches and beliefs manifests. However, despite that confusion and the many errant ideas that have become popular, God's way, His church being the pillar and ground of the truth, remains the best and most reliable—and stable—anchor for the believer who seeks Biblical truth.

In addition to describing the church as the pillar and ground of the truth, how does Scripture otherwise describe a faithful and true New Testament church?

*And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, **Which is his body**, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23. Ephesians 5:30, in the context of Christ loving the "church," affirms this same truth)*

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps,

governments, diversities of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:28. After thoroughly developing the analogy of a body in which all parts (Members) of the body work together in harmony for the well-being of the body, Paul in this verse applies the analogy of the body to the church. In the New Testament, the doctrine of the church is not viewed as a sectarian bone of contention, but as the centerpiece, anchor, and, yes, "Pillar," of God's truth and the work of the gospel in this world)

A person's attitude toward the church of his/her membership in fact reveals that person's attitude toward the Lord, for these passages associate the church with his "Body." The Biblical point is one of analogy, but the analogy teaches an important point that is essential for a healthy faith and a godly life in the God-appointed community of His church. As a point of clarification, the New Testament uses the word "Church" to refer to one of two entities. 1) It most often refers to a local assembly of believers, as the church at Philippi or at Ephesus. 2) On a few occasions, the New Testament uses the word to refer to that final and future gathering of all the elect at the Second Coming. Never, not one time, does the New Testament use the word "Church" to refer to any other mystical body of believers. This aberrant and unbiblical use of the word "Church" is perhaps the most common view of our day. Modern Christians will refer to the "Church" when speaking of all Christians of all stripe that are in the world today. Never—not one time—does the New Testament use the word in this mystical way. Thus, when a believer shows grace and, yes, submission to the church of his membership, he shows respectful submission to the body of Christ, the Lord's church. And when a person shows disrespect or contempt to the church of his membership, he is in fact showing contempt for the body of Christ, as specifically stated in the above verses.

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation. In this context, Peter has taught that the long delay of the Second Coming relates to God's purpose and promise. This verse retains that focus. How is the Lord's longsuffering salvation? The Lord knows every person whom He chose in Christ before He created the world, and He will not return in glory till He has brought that last chosen sheep into His eternal fold. He will not come any sooner and thereby cut any of His chosen vessels out of their God-willed eternal inheritance.

As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood. Although Paul confronted Peter at Antioch (Galatians 2) for Peter's blameworthy failure, both men loved and respected each other. And both men believed the same truth. There is no contradiction between Paul's and Peter's writings in Scripture. Peter highly praises Paul's writings. The Holy Spirit directed both men to write. By his

reference to "these things," Peter is focusing on Paul's writings about the Second Coming, the same theme that Peter has developed in 2 Peter 3. We may read 1 Corinthians 15 or 1 Thessalonians 4, both written by Paul, and find great comfort in the writings. However, comforting as they are, we must join Peter and conclude that they contain some things that are indeed "...*hard to be understood.*" However, Peter warns, reading something that is hard to understand does not excuse our twisting of any Scripture to suit our personal fancy or private imaginative interpretation. When we twist Scripture to our private interpretation, and thereby put our ideas in conflict with the community of the Lord's church, we sadly fulfill Peter's description.

...which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction. A man could memorize the whole New Testament, but remain "unlearned and unstable" in his faith if he follows his own fanciful interpretation instead of the true teachings of Scripture. In reading and hearing people talk about their beliefs, it has been my observation that most bizarre and twisted (Look up the meaning of "wrest" in this passage) out of joint ideas grow out of people ignoring context and trying to interpret one verse as they wish instead of allowing context to interpret the verse for them.

An example. Simple words that appear in a given context must be defined consistently throughout the context and not randomly redefined from one verse to the next. In Romans 8:28, Paul uses the words "all things." Far too often, believers of all stripe will read this verse and wholly ignore the context in which the verse appears, concluding that God causes all events and manipulates them for good. Try convincing the survivors of Hitler's ovens that God caused Hitler to build the ovens and murder millions of Jews. Try to persuade them that God either caused these events or manipulated them for a mystical greater good. Abominable! If we take the time to read the context in which this verse appears, we will shortly discover that Paul uses the same two words (The same in both first century Greek and King James English) in Romans 8:32, just four short verses later.

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

In this verse, the meaning of the two words is clear. God gives us these "all things" because He spared not his own Son, but, in delivering Him up for us all, God intends to freely give us "all things." Now follow the contextual links of this term. Whatever Paul means by "all things" in Romans 8:32, he means exactly the same thing in Romans 8:28. Would any reputable believer dare to think for a moment that God gave the world Hitler and the ovens through Jesus' death? That Hitler and the ovens would never have been except for Jesus'

death? Beyond abominable! And not remotely Biblical. Thus, the truth of “all things” in Romans 8:28 is simply and clearly explained by the same term in Romans 8:32. Whatever God gives to His people because He did not spare, but delivered up His own Son, all of those things, always work together for good to all who love God and who are called according to His purpose.

Non-contextual private interpretations of Scripture account for most similarly bizarre interpretations. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ has no obligation to believe or to follow any such wrested interpretations of Scripture. Rather than praising those who ignore context and teach wrested ideas, as if they were spiritual giants, Peter describes such folks as “...*unlearned and unstable.*” Peter further reveals the inevitable conclusion of such folks and their “wrested” thinking, “...*to their own destruction.*” If you have ever encountered such a person, be patient and observe. The first thing you learn in observing this person is that he/she refuses to listen to anyone or any idea that does not agree with his/her wrested interpretations. He shall therefore never come to the knowledge of the truth apart from a profound and life changing repentance. Sooner or later, often much sooner, these people will implode. Their “*own destruction*” is self-inflicted. The Lord will not allow human ego and prideful pseudo-intellect to prevail over His truth or His church. At the end of the day, unlearned and unstable people who wrest the Scriptures will fade into irrelevant obscurity, and God’s “*pillar and ground of the truth,*” His church will stand and be proclaiming that truth till the Second Coming. (Ephesians 3:21; “...*throughout all ages.*”) More on this passage next week.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor