

"TWISTING THE SCRIPTURES"

2 Peter 3:15-18

Introduction:

The Holy Bible is a wonderful gift of God to His people. It is a marvelous thing to study about the formation of the Bible. God gave the Bible through the writings of about forty different men. They lived centuries apart in some cases, and even in different cultures, yet they wrote a book that has a remarkable sense of harmony. It is of special interest that the Apostle Peter includes the letters of Paul right alongside the Old Testament scriptures. "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." "The other scriptures" indicates that Paul's writings are of equal value. Without doubt the New Testament writers sensed that they were writing under special guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is somewhat encouraging however to discover that even Peter found some parts of Paul's letters "hard to be understood." I am not sure which parts Peter would have included in this category, but I have a few that I could include. However, their difficulty did not mean that they were anything less than the word of God. I have found by experience that my own spiritual receptivity has much to do with the difficulty in understanding a particular passage.

Every good gift that God has given to man can be misused. This is true even of the Holy Scriptures. Peter accuses some of "wresting" the scriptures. The word he uses here is a very graphic word. It means to twist, or to torture. It comes from a word that was used of a machine used in torture. The basic idea is that of twisting a passage of scripture to make it mean something different from its original intention. This word of Peter brings before every student of the Bible a word of caution. When we handle the holy Scriptures as a student or as a teacher, we must be careful to handle them correctly. Real danger is involved in the misuse of the Scriptures.

I. THE TWISTING OF THE SCRIPTURES IS A SYMPTON OF A SPIRITUAL NEED.

Peter uses two words to uncover the spiritual need of those misusing the Scriptures. Their tendency to twist the scriptures to fit their fancy was really a revelation of their heart condition.

They were "unlearned." Evidently they had refused to avail themselves of the opportunities provided to learn the things which they needed to know. A full understanding of the Christian faith comes only with time and work. One must give himself to diligent study if he ever hopes to achieve such a comprehension of the faith. So many Scripture "twisters" that I have known have refused to open their lives to God appointed and God trained teachers of the Word. They knew too much to allow anyone to instruct them in the faith. This is a sign of severe spiritual need in any Christian life. God places value upon a teachable spirit and a desire after knowledge.

They are "unstable." The root idea of the word is that they lack steadiness or steadfastness. They are still impressionable and impulsive. They get excited real quickly over things, but they can become discouraged almost as quickly. They lack that strength of character that should mark the godly. The longer I serve the Lord, the more I have come to appreciate steadfastness. I have been disappointed so many times by spiritual "ninety day wonders" that they have almost made me a skeptic. Give me a tribe that does not make so much noise and dust, but keeps at it. They have the strength of character to keep on through the hard times as well as through the good times.

Let me encourage you to check on those who twist the scriptures. See if you cannot find them down underneath some rather obvious spiritual needs. I know from my own heart that my own

spiritual shortcomings have a way of effecting how I handle the word of God. My handling of the word will never rise above my maturity in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. THE TWISTING OF THE SCRIPTURES IS A DESTRUCTIVE MISUSE OF SCRIPTURE.

"Which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." The Holy Scriptures are a very precious instrument of God for good---when used properly. But when they are abused or misused, they can become the occasion of terrific destruction on your life. Exactly how these "twisters" of Scripture were going about their twisting of the Scriptures, we cannot be sure. Evidently it had something to do with taking statements written by Paul and using them as a justification of fleshly indulgence. They may have been so using some of his statements concerning the freedom from the law that we know in Christ. Let me just point you to some of the different kinds of twisting that all of us may be tempted to do unless we exercise caution.

One common form of twisting of the Scriptures is that of emphasizing one piece of scriptural truth to the exclusion of another equally precious truth. The truth of God is very finely balanced instrument. It is so easy for you to get off balance in your understanding of the truth. Let me point you to one example. Many very serious and sincere students of Scripture have discovered the precious truth of the divine sovereignty in the Scriptures. They have come to understand that "salvation is of the Lord." But then some mistakenly begin to make this their principle of interpretation. They will be able to find references to the divine sovereignty in almost every verse of Scripture. They begin to completely neglect those passages that speak of human responsibility, and will even find ways to explain away those references that say, "Whosoever will, let him come." They are guilty of "scripture twisting." We all have a tendency to do this with our favorite doctrines.

A kindred kind of Scripture twisting is that of imposing upon the Scriptures our predetermined system of doctrine. A very common form of this is seen in those who feel very strongly about a certain eschatological system. Those who come with some deep convictions about the events surrounding the coming of our Lord have a tendency to squeeze all of the Scriptures until they fit into their doctrinal mold. I have set at the feet of great teachers who were pre, post, and "a", but they have all been guilty of it at times. We must ever be ready to alter our system to fit the Scriptures, and not be guilty of altering the Scriptures to fit our system. Such twisting is also seen in different groups who try to find scriptural justification for their present form of church government. It is amazing how all of the modern church groups find Biblical justification for the way they do things. You can almost hear some Scriptures screaming as they are twisted to fit the system that has already been developed for them.

An even more common form of Scripture twisting is that of lifting a verse or sometimes even a part of a verse out of its context. A text without a context is a pretext. No verse of Scripture can ever be rightly interpreted apart from its context. You must know in which part of Scripture it is found. You must know the intention of the writer when it was written. You need to know the type of the literature. Just the other day I read a little booklet advocating the practice of speaking in tongues. In the process of it, they quote from the Psalm where the psalmist said, "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." When you go back and study the context of that verse, it is obvious that the primary word in that psalm is about the physical provisions for life. Nothing could have been further from his mind than the New Testament gift of speaking in tongues. All of us may be guilty of this---and preachers may be the worst offenders. But this is Scripture twisting.

Another subtle form of scripture twisting is that of forcing the Scriptures to fit our religious experiences. None of us can separate ourselves entirely from our experiences when we come to the Scriptures. All of us read it through different eyes. But we must be careful not to read into the Scriptures our experience. If you will be discerning, you will soon be able to tell what kind of experience people have had by how they handle the Bible. Some who have become aware of the indwelling Christ begin to find this truth everywhere. The tragic thing

is that they miss many other good things which the Lord wants to show them because of their refusal to look beyond their experience. We must always interpret our experiences by the Word rather than the word by our experiences.

Let me just point to one other rather common form of Scripture twisting. This has to do with the forcing of the Scriptures to fit into the apparent insights of modern man. There are some who are constantly concerned lest the Scriptures would appear to be unscientific or would seem to be overshadowed by some new apparent breakthrough on the part of modern man. Consequently they will begin to find all of these modern insights hidden away in some text of Scriptures. Some have found airplanes and helicopters in the pages of the holy Bible. This is nothing more than Scripture twisting. No genuine breakthrough of modern man will ever destroy the insights and the truths of the holy Scriptures---not if it is really the word of the eternal Cod. Just let it be what it is--the word of God to sinful man. Don't try to make out of it a book of science or any other discipline.

III. THE TWISTING OF THE SCRIPTURES IS A HINDRANCE TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

The burden of the Apostle throughout this letter has been spiritual growth. He never allowed us to forget it. He closes with another expression of this concern. Yet, 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 the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen."

The concern of the Apostle is that such tampering with the Scriptures leads to spiritual instability. Those who are handling the Scriptures wrongly are ever in danger of falling from their foundation of steadfastness. What is the opposite of this instability? It is to be a growing Christian.

In the mind of Peter there was a clear connection between growing in grace and knowledge and the proper use of the Holy Scriptures. If you are serious about balanced spiritual growth, you must become a Bible Christian. You must study the Bible doctrinally, devotionally, prayerfully, and obediently. You must alter your life to fit what you find in the Scriptures, not the Scriptures to fit your life.

Conclusion:

I want to close this message with an appeal. The appeal is for you to give more time to the study of the word of God. By this I mean the study of the Bible itself. Some of us spend much time with books about the Bible, and with tapes about the Bible, but so little with the Bible. The Bible undiluted is the best for the growing Christian.

The appeal is also for you to be cautious. Be aware of the tendencies in all of us toward spiritual imbalance. God places a great premium upon balance. A proper approach to the Scriptures will help you maintain this needed spiritual balance.