

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Peter's Respect for Paul's Inspired Writings

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. (2 Peter 3:16, KJV 1900)

One of the strongest witnesses in favor of the Bible's supernatural origin is the incredible—beyond human ability—consistency of its contents. The Bible contains sixty-six individual books, composed by around forty to forty-five men across approximately sixteen centuries. Yet, from Genesis to Revelation, its testimony is consistent in its teachings. In human thought and literary accomplishment, never would so many men from various cultures and ages write with such agreement in their message. From Job, likely the oldest of the books, to Revelation, we read powerful words of hope in the resurrection, a literal, bodily resurrection, and the Lord's return for His people. Within the New Testament, we would struggle to find two men more different in personality than Paul and Peter. And, while the Lord gave each man a different assignment, our present study leaves no doubt that these two men held each other in the highest regard, grounded on the truth that they held in common.

As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things.... Notice Peter's all-inclusive commentary: "...in all his epistles." In the context of 2 Peter 3, Peter has dealt in detail with the Second Coming. Peter tells us that Paul included this truth "...in all his epistles." I have not specifically searched all of Paul's New Testament letters for evidence of his teaching on the Second Coming, but I cannot recall at the moment any of Paul's letters that do not include this truth. If a doctrine was so central to the first century faith that Paul included it in "...all his epistles," and Peter devotes so much detail to it in his writings, we should give that truth its deserved bedrock position in our own faith. The doctrine of the Second Coming and our resurrection is not an incidental idea of secondary value. It is foundational to the "...faith which was once delivered to the saints." (Jude 1:3)

...in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest. Admittedly, and with Peter's agreement, all of Paul's writings are not easy to understand. Difficulty in understanding, however, does not license any reader of Paul's epistles to abandon sound language and contextual interpretation for private imagination. And, to the grave disappointment of some Bible students, the Lord has not—anywhere in Scripture—indicated

that he has sanctified human creativity or imagination in our interpretation of Scripture. Quite the opposite, Scripture warns us against the idea. Psalm 12:6-7 reminds us that God gave specific attention to the individual words of Scripture, and that He intends to preserve those words "...from this generation for ever." In a powerful affirmation of this truth, Paul builds his argument for a full chapter on the integrity of one word in the Old Testament Book of Genesis. (Galatians 3; notice Verse 16)

On rare occasions in my almost sixty years of personal experience and Christian study, I have observed a few men who appeared to actually strive for the most bizarre and unnatural interpretation of Scripture that they could develop in their human (And therefore broken and flawed) creativity. Instead of respecting and following the words of Scripture, these few souls impose their private interpretations onto the words of Scripture, and, at times, even boast that we are commanded of the Lord to use our human creativity and seek a meaning that is not at all revealed in the text to discover the truth of Scripture that supposedly does not clearly appear in the actual text of the Bible. I suggest that this attitude falls far more clearly under Peter's description, "...which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest," than it qualifies as a valid interpretation of Scripture. Notice Scripture's simple description of a very old "Lesson" that godly men taught the people.

*So they read in the book in the law of God **distinctly**, and **gave the sense**, and **caused them to understand the reading.** (Nehemiah 8:8; emphasis added)*

Nehemiah does not mention a single word or thought about the Levites that day departing from the text of what they read in the "...book in the law of God." Quite the opposite, they read "distinctly." When we encounter a passage in Scripture that is admittedly "...hard to be understood," we need to spend more time with the passage, especially regarding the precise language of Scripture, to uncover the Holy Spirit's righteous reasons for using the exact words and sentence structure that He directed the writer of the passage to use, not unleash our broken, carnal "Creativity" to impose

our private and bizarre interpretation onto the passage. Often whole sentence structure, not just a generic definition of a single word, is necessary to uncover the intended meaning of a passage. Beware the inclination to run to an abbreviated original language dictionary, and, based on a brief definition of one word, impose an interpretation onto a passage. This word chasing strategy doesn't work in our English language, and it equally doesn't work in our study of the Bible.

Peter did not indicate that Paul wrote anything that was impossible to understand; only that some of his writings were "...hard to be understood." When we encounter a passage in the Bible, Paul's writings or other inspired writings, that seems difficult for us to understand, our righteous task is to search the passage, always in its contextual setting, not impose our carnal "Creativity" onto a private interpretation of the passage.

One of the simplest—and often neglected—tools to interpret any passage, especially those texts that strike us as especially difficult, is context. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines "Context" as follows:

The part or parts immediately preceding or following a passage or word as determining or helping to reveal its meaning; the surrounding structure as determining the behaviour of a grammatical item, speech sound, etc.

As I occasionally read various attempts to explain those difficult passages, I increasingly wonder if contemporary Bible students understand this simple literary tool that dictates the meaning of words and sentences in any literary work, Scripture included. The popularity of the title *Treasure of Scripture Knowledge* increases my concern. This book claims to associate over 500,000 links within Scripture based on a single point, the appearance of a common word in various Biblical passages. In some odd way, this book and its many advocates seem to think that the appearance of a word anywhere in the Bible creates a mystical "Contextual link" between Passage A and Passage B. I cannot name another single book or attitude toward Scripture that has done more damage to sound Biblical interpretation and extensive, contextual study of the Scriptures. This work is often used as a convenient tool for the lazy preacher or Bible student to create the appearance of insight or associations of various passages based on the simple appearance of one common word in the two passages. Disciples of this lazy man's Bible aid ignore the greater context of both passages, the literary structure of each passage, and chase non-existent associations between texts that have no literary integrity or standing whatever.

Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. (2 Timothy 2:7)

We gain sound knowledge of Scripture by considering its words, not by contradicting or ignoring them. And we gain that sound insight by the Lord's assistance, not by our private speculation. Whenever a man cites a passage and begins his explanation of it with "This represents..." beware. We grow in our understanding of Scripture by considering it, not by rewriting it in our minds, even if not on paper. I recall many years ago hearing a preacher cite Romans 5:1.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
(Romans 5:1, KJV 1900)

Immediately after quoting the verse, the man went into an extended monologue about why the comma following "faith" was misplaced and should follow "justified" instead. To play with punctuation in Romans 5:1 is as unsound and as unethical as the highly publicized editing of Luke 23:43. A modern group claims that the comma following "thee" should follow "To day." For the thief to be with Jesus in paradise on the very day they were both crucified, the simple point of the verse, contradicts this group's idea of soul sleep, so they merely rewrite the verse to fit their wrong idea. The comma placement in Romans 5:1 is correct; the man's idea about the passage is wrong.

While human intellect, and especially human imagination, is a treasure, we should develop the habit of following Scripture's simple message rather than trying to rewrite the Bible to our liking. Paul teaches a vital doctrine to Bible truth in teaching that the Lord's church, not preachers or deacons or other individual believers, is the "...pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15b) This point requires that our interpretation of Scripture while obviously relying on the Lord's enlightenment is a truth held in trust by the Lord's church. Several aberrant and errant movements started in our country in the nineteenth century, all claiming that the church and historical Christianity had forgotten or lost some vital major truth that they newly discovered and sought to restore. This idea contradicts 1 Timothy 3:15 at its foundation. When individual men or groups make such a claim of massive departure, and simultaneously claim that God called them individually to restore that hidden "Truth" to the church, beware. The man's claims are false, wholly contradictory to 1 Timothy 3:15.

Folks, in our Bible (And I specifically refer to the King James Authorized Version), we have an invaluable treasure. How well do we treasure it? How well do we invest our time and study of it?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor