Exiles: Faithfully Present in a Foreign Land
39—Don't Do the Twist 09 Aug 2026
2 Peter 3:14–16 J-T Richards

Introduction

There are many quotes from the Bible that are taken out of context. Sometimes they're largely harmless. For example, Tim Tebow would play with black eye stickers with "Phil 4:13" on them. In that verse Paul famously declared, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me", including, apparently, win the Heisman Trophy in college while also winning two national championships. Here's a funny take on that trend that seems popular with Christian athletes: I can do all thing…through a verse take out of context.

Sometimes a verse out of context is largely harmless, and sometimes it can begin to be quite misleading. We've all seen the verse posted on social media, often right before an election:

> 2 Chron 7:14 If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.
>
> 2 Chronicles 7:14

This one is a little less harmless as the context is often that of voting for a particular party, as if humbling one's self means to vote. Sometimes they're much more dangerous. Years ago I saw online a kitschy plaque with a Bible verse. The clear implication was that by worshiping the Lord one would prosper financially. Here's the verse that was printed on it:

> Mt 4:9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."
>
> Matthew 4:9

We are here today because Jesus did not, in fact, take Satan up on Satan's promise to give the kingdoms of the world to him. Scripture twisting has been around from the beginning of humanity, and Satan has been the ring leader for it since the garden. Today we will see the real danger in twisting Scripture and we will see the incredible outcome of remaining faithful to it. We're in 2 Peter 3.

> 2 Pet 3:14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. 15 And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 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.
>
> 2 Peter 3:14–16

Be Diligent

Peter begins this new paragraph by saying they are waiting for "these". These what? He means the very things he has just written about. They are waiting for the Lord to fulfill his promise, for the fullness of their salvation. It is not yet complete. As Paul explained in Ephesians 1, the Holy Spirit "is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Eph 1:13–14). There is a real sense in which they are *already* saved. There is also the real sense in which they are *being* saved. And as Peter emphasizes in this letter, there is the very real sense in which they *will be* saved. The fullness of their salvation is the very thing for which they are waiting.

Further, they are waiting for the fullness of salvation to come to all God's people. Peter said the Lord isn't slow to fulfill his promise but is patient toward you, not wishing any of you should perish, but that all of you should reach repentance. "These things" includes the full extent of salvation. As Jesus said in John 6, it is his Father's will that "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out" (John 6:37).

Still further, they are waiting for the day of judgment, for on that day the earth will be burned up and purified and the Lord Jesus will re-create it and then God's people will dwell with him in new heavens and a new earth.

This is our hope! This is the very thing we long for, for on that day all evil will be gone. As the apostle John said in Revelation 21, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4).

Therefore, Peter says, since you are waiting for *these things*, the fullness of your salvation, be diligent. Again, we see Peter's application of his proclamation of the coming of Christ is for believers. The reality of the Lord coming again motivates and compels us toward something. Yes, that includes evangelism, but Peter's point is very direct: because these things are coming, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish.

The word "found" here is the same word in verse 10, translated there as "exposed". The idea is that when the Lord returns, nothing will be hidden from him. All will be revealed. The earth and the works done on it will exposed, or "found" by the Lord. Peter says because these things are coming, be diligent to be found by the Lord spotless and without blemish. This language is language of sacrifice. An offering to the Lord had to be an animal without blemish or defect.

> Deut 17:1 "You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the LORD your God."
>
> Deuteronomy 17:1

If you had an ox that broke its leg, it would be tempting to offer it as a sacrifice as it probably wouldn't make it. You were gonna lose it anyway, so you might as well give it to the Lord, right? No! God demands the best ox or the best sheep. A weak and sickly lamb would not do for a sacrifice. There is no sacrifice in "giving" something that was going to die anyway.

A life lived for the Lord is a life of worship, and worship requires offering to him a sacrifice without spot or blemish. Notice Peter says to be *diligent* to be found like this. Peter recognizes the impossibility of actually being with spot or blemish. The apostle John wrote about this in his first letter.

> 1 Jn 1:8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
>
> 1 John 1:8–9

John is clear: no one is without sin, yet each one of us can be found without spot or blemish. How is that, if none of us can avoid sin? A life of following the Lord is a life of repentance. Repentance is never a one-time thing, as if you repent when you become a follower of Jesus and then you're all set, just like trusting in the Lord is never a one-time thing. It is a life of faith, and therefore a life of ongoing repentance.

As we confess our sins, the Lord is faithful to forgive us, but John added another word. The Lord is also *just* to forgive us. That is, he is righteous to forgive us. To say this another way, if we confess our sins he would be *unjust* to not forgive us. Why? Because Christ has suffered once for all for sin. Paul said in Romans 6 that Christ will never die again, "For the death he died he died to sin, *once for all*" (Rom 6:10). For all those who are in Christ, Christ has already died and so God would be unjust to not forgive their sins.

When Peter says to be diligent to be found without spot or blemish, he means to live a life of repentance, a life spent pursuing righteousness. Then he adds, "and at peace". Be diligent to be found by the Lord without spot or blemish, *and at peace*. He means peace with God. How?

> Rom 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
>
> Romans 5:1

Life in Christ is life at peace with God. Be diligent to be found without spot or blemish, and at peace with God. This is the life of faith, a life of following the Lord. This is through Christ. In his first letter Peter uses the same sacrificial language of being without spot or blemish.

> 1 Pet 1:18 … knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.
>
> 1 Peter 1:18–19

This is how you and I can be found without blemish or spot! We can be found *in Christ*, through faith. By living a life of faithful repentance, when the Lord comes he will find us in this state, because of the righteousness of Christ. We can follow the Lord, not by simply keeping a list of rules, but by living in response to the incredible and profound grace given us in Christ. We pursue him by loving what he loves and by hating what he hates.

The Patience of Our Lord

Peter continues in verse 15. He tells them to count the patience of the Lord as salvation. He's already mentioned the patience of the Lord. He said in verse 8 the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, but is *patient* toward you. Patient for what? The Lord is patient, not wishing that any of you should perish but that all of you should reach repentance. That is, the Lord's patience is salvation.

What feels to us like a delay is the Lord working out his plan for salvation in time. God's purposes are working out in time, so that we experience his goodness in a series of steps. This results in more and more people believing in the Lord and turning from their sins. It is *salvation*. God's patience—his delay—results in salvation for more people.

Peter continues his thought, but in an unexpected way. He says to count the Lord's patience as salvation. That part's easy. Then he adds, "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".

Peter is indicating that Paul's letters were received as inspired Scripture, just as his letters were and the four Gospels were and all the other books that make up the New Testament. No one decided which writings were Scripture. The writings that were inspired Scripture were *received* as inspired Scripture. The process of compiling all these writings into a single canon of Scripture was the process of recognizing which writings had been received as Scripture. Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus took a while for the church in Antioch to recognize it had been received as Scripture by the Ephesians.

Peter recognizes Paul's writings as Scripture. He mentions his letters, plural. I don't think Peter is referring to just Paul's letter to the Galatians. It would make sense for Peter to refer to Galatians since Galatia was one of the five provinces Peter is writing to. I think he means Paul wrote to them more generally, as his letters were quickly copied and distributed to other churches. He wrote to them in the sense that he wrote even his "private" letters, such as those to Timothy, intending for them to be read widely by others. This leaves the question: what does Peter mean? What matters does Paul write about in all his letters? The great Augustine is helpful here.

> Peter, in his second epistle, urged us to holiness in living and character, declaring that this world would pass. New heavens and a new earth are expected which will be given to the just to inhabit. … Some people had used certain obscure passages from Paul's writings in order to excuse their lack of concern to live well, on the ground that they were secure in their salvation. Peter was saying that some of the things which Paul said are hard to understand and that these people were twisting them to their own ruin.
>
> Augustine, On Faith and Works 14.22

Well. That didn't really answer the question! Peter's point isn't that there is a specific thing the false teachers were twisting in Paul's letters, other than the truth that salvation is secure in Christ because of Christ's righteousness—not ours—and therefore the expectation that all those in Christ would live in lives of holiness and godliness, like Peter has also urged. Part of the false teachers' teaching was the idea that there were no real standards of holiness

for God's people. That is, they were rejecting and denying what had already been revealed. Bede is helpful in this regard.

> The heretics corrupt every part of Scripture. There is no book in either the Old or the New Testament which they have not perverted according to their own fantasies, by adding to it, subtracting from it, or altering something which it says to make it mean something else.
>
> Bede the Venerable, On 2 Peter

False teachers are always changing and adjusting the meaning of words, challenging what has been clear for centuries. Listen carefully. If someone today teaches something no one in church history has ever taught before, there's a reason: it ain't true. I understand there are many things we have a better *grasp* on right now, having had nearly 2,000 years to think and ponder and study, but if a person says something contrary and new, there's a reason. It's false.

Our understanding and ability to articulate biblical truth can grow over time. The Council of Nicea, for example, along with the Council of Chalcedon gave us the right language to use when speaking of the Trinity, but that doesn't mean this was a new teaching. Some of the things Justin Martyr said in the 160s would be problematic if we didn't recognize he lacked the precise language the church hammered out over a couple centuries after him. We can become precise and more careful with articulating truth, but we cannot reinterpret Scripture out of whole cloth, completely changing the meaning of words and direct statements of Scripture.

Twisting Scripture

We've seen this twisting of Scripture throughout history. We see Peter fights against the twisting of Scripture in a variety of ways. Peter doesn't state directly what the actual teaching was, but we get glimpses throughout this letter. In chapter 2 he says this:

> 2 Pet 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be
> false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even
> denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruc-
> tion. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of
> truth will be blasphemed. 3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false
> words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is
> not asleep.
>
> 2 Peter 2:1–3

They were greedy, and therefore they sought to exploit God's people. Whatever their exact teaching, they were profiting from it. Peter says many will follow their sensuality. As we saw several weeks ago, sensuality may include sexual immorality but it's the idea of *unrestrained self-indulgence*, self-indulgence in anything. Whatever the exact teaching of those false teachers, people were drawn to their promise of unrestrained self-indulgence. We know they were denying the reality of coming judgment so it's not hard to piece together

what they were claiming: if there is no judgment to fear, just go ahead and do whatever you want. They twisted Scripture somehow in order to justify this false claim.

This problem of twisting Scripture has been from the very beginning. What did the serpent say to Adam and Eve in the garden? "Did God really say?" The serpent twisted God's words in the garden of Eden and has been twisting them ever since. Peter wrote this letter because it was a problem in the first century. I quoted Bede earlier who claimed it was a problem in the seventh century. There were those who twisted Scripture, he said, whether by adding to it or by subtracting from it or by changing what it actually says in order to fit someone's particular fancy. Scripture is often reinterpreted in ways to satisfy someone's opinion or preference. This is what false teachers always do, and it started in the time of the apostles themselves.

Several hundred years ago many used Scripture to defend chattel slavery. This was a twisting of Scripture for they left out significant parts of Scripture and twisted other parts to mean something new, something that made it sound like slavery was God's idea.

It is true Scripture writes instructions to believers who were slaves, and instructed them to obey their masters. As we saw in 1 Peter, these instructions were actually quite subversive, for they undercut the very foundation for slavery. Remember, household codes in the first century were addressed to the man of the house. He was instructed to control his wife and children, his servants, etc. By writing directly to slaves in these churches Peter was saying something profound: they were free, moral agents who could honor the Lord and participate in his mission even in their earthly status as a slave.

Peter was not defending slavery; he was ripping out its foundation, for if a slave were a free, moral agent accountable directly to God, how could any other free, moral agent who was also accountable to God seek to *own* another?

Think of Paul's letter to Philemon. Philemon's slave had run away and encountered the apostle Paul. God saved him and he became quite helpful to Paul and his ministry. One day Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter and in this letter thoroughly and completely destroyed the very foundation of slavery altogether. He wrote this:

> Phlm 1:17 So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. 18 If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.
>
> Philemon 1:17–18

At some point or another, most of us have wondered why the Bible doesn't just say, "You shall not own slaves", but if you take this text at face value, you see the very idea of slavery is destroyed. Paul, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, urges Philemon to receive his runaway slave as if he were the apostle himself. The idea is that in Christ we are all equal. Philemon would never presume to "own" the apostle; how, then, could he ever think he could "own" Onesimus? In the first century slaves were treated as mere property. Paul indicates they are not mere property; they are as the apostle himself.

Remember Bede's comment. Heretics would twist Scripture by adding to it—or by *subtracting* from it. In American history slaves often heard the same verses preached to them: "Slaves, obey your masters". They never heard the rest of the text!

Eph 6:5 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Ephesians 6:5–9

Here Paul instructs Christians who are slaves to obey their masters "as you would Christ". Then he says to the slave owners, "Do the same to them". That is, serve them *as you would Christ*. What Christian in the first century who owned slaves would ever imagine enslaving the Lord Jesus and being harsh to him the way slaves were often treated? Rather than come right out and say, "Free all your slaves", Scripture urges this very thing by showing that every human being, regardless of earthly status, has inherent dignity and value. Only by ignoring—twisting—such Scriptures can a person argue that slavery was acceptable, yet this was the sort of Scripture-twisting that happened in early American history.

We see similar Scripture twisting today. The Presbyterian Church USA—the largest Presbyterian denomination—is currently debating whether to require their clergy—their pastors—to be monogamous. Notice I did not say they were debating whether their pastors should be required to be married. They're debating whether or not to require they be committed to their *current* partners.

What sort of Scripture twisting must one go through to deny the requirement for elders in the church to be the "husband of one wife"? Remember, that's a character quality, not a status. Paul is not saying in 1 Timothy 3 an elder must be married; rather, he's saying that a man who would serve as an elder must be a one-woman sort of man, one who, if he is married, is devoted to her and only her.

We see many today—people who name the name of Christ—who simply deny what Scripture says about human sexuality, twisting the Scriptures to mean something else. Often they will find an historical data point and try to use that to change the meaning of the text. Listen carefully: the historical context may well be helpful to rightly interpret Scripture. We saw this in the book of Joshua. The historical reality of Ancient Near Eastern culture does, in fact, help us to understand difficult texts.

In Deuteronomy 7 God tells Israel when they enter the land of Canaan, they must devote the people to destruction. "Devote them to complete destruction" sounds pretty severe. The first fortress they encountered was Jericho in Joshua 6. We see the same expression there: devote to complete destruction, and it sounds—to us—like total annihilation.

Josh 6:21 Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.

Joshua 6:21

That sounds like a lot of killing, doesn't it? Look at the rest of God's command about what it means to "devote to destruction". God was clear: you must devote them to complete

destruction. Okay. What does that mean, exactly? When we worked our way through Joshua I explained to you the cultural context of the Ancient Near East and how the original Israelites would have received that instruction. The cultural context simply illustrates what *the text itself* says. In that same passage of Deuteronomy, after instructing them to devote the Canaanites to destruction, God continues.

> Deut 7:3 You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, 4 for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. 5 But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire.
>
> Deuteronomy 7:3–5

If "devote to complete destruction" means to literally kill every single inhabitant, then why would God tell them to not marry those who worshiped other gods? Wouldn't they be dead? That would be like saying, "You must never go to the moon, and you must never walk on it". If I don't go to the moon, how could I ever walk on it? It is clear from the text of Scripture itself that "devote to complete destruction" does not mean genocide, so the rhetoric of wholesale slaughter must be read in this light.

This is not twisting Scripture; this is interpreting Scripture in its historical context and in its exegetical context. There are those who use a supposed "historical context" to twist Scripture today. People want to deny outright what Scripture says about human sexuality, or they want to change the meaning of words so that Scripture says something else about human sexuality, or they add some sort of context that changes what Scripture means, so that the Scripture doesn't mean what it means. It's the same old playbook that Peter was fighting against in the first century, Bede was fighting against in the seventh century, and what faithful men and women were fighting against in the 1600s, and now again in these last 20 years or so. It's the same old playbook from the garden of Eden: "Did God really say".

Application

What is Peter's point? He's urging the believers in Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia to remain faithfully present in a world that is increasingly hostile to faith in Jesus. In his first letter he urged them to remain faithful even if—*when*—it leads to suffering. In this letter he's urging them to remain faithful in the midst of false teachers seeking to exploit them for personal gain.

In all of this, a significant aim for Peter is the mission of God. The point of faithful presence is this is a primary means God uses to bring about faith and repentance in people. As we saw in the first letter, they must live in such a way that others see their faithfulness and see their good works and begin to ask why they live so differently. Peter says to always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks for a reason for the *hope* that is in them. Followers of Christ must live in a manner that demonstrates their hope is in Christ!

Our hope is, as Peter has labored to say in this second letter, the return of Christ and the renewal of all things. Our hope is the Lord Jesus transforming the entire world and all

those who trust in him. It's coming! For this reason we must pursue holiness and godliness, for without these things no one will care about the "hope" that is within us, for not pursuing holiness and godliness reveals an utter lack of hope within us.

Part of pursuing holiness and godliness is being diligent to be found by the Lord without spot or blemish. As we've seen this is only possible through faith in Jesus, for we have been ransomed from the futile ways inherited by our forefathers with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. Notice the connection Peter makes between being diligent to be found without spot or blemish and rejecting the very thing the false teachers were doing: twisting Scripture.

What this means for you and for me is simple and straightforward: Scripture must shape our thinking. Our thinking must not and *cannot* shape Scripture. We don't get to pick the parts we like and either ignore or outright reject the parts we don't like. Jesus is either Lord, or he is not. This is our common confession. The most basic and fundamental confession of faith shared by all believers in Jesus is this: Jesus is Lord. One thing he cannot be is *sort of Lord*. He cannot be Lord over some parts of our lives and not over other parts. He cannot be *half-Lord*.

We must be diligent to be found spotless and without blemish and a significant way in which we do this is by submitting to the authority of Scripture, even when it's contrary to the culture. Remember, the point of 1 Peter is faithfulness to Jesus is costly. No one really cared if Christians worshiped Jesus. The problem in the first century is Christians therefore would not worship any other gods, and this was seen as them being bad citizens, as those who act contrary to the public good. They were seen as full of hate and mean-spirited for not participating in civic worship ceremonies by honoring the gods and engaging in the drunken revelry and orgies connected to the trade guilds.

It's not hard to see how we get to 2 Peter. If faithfulness to Jesus is costly, then just change what faithfulness to Jesus *means*. If faithfully following Jesus as explained in Scripture leads to suffering, then just change what it means to faithfully follow Jesus. In this context, and in our world today, this really means *do whatever you want*. And if there's no fear of coming judgment, what does it matter if you offer a pinch of incense to Zeus or party at the guild festival? I mean, you can keep your job and provide for your family, right? That's a good thing! Why would God be opposed to such a thing? Surely you can hear the echoes of, "Did God really say".

Think of Peter's own experience with Jesus. I've cited John 6 a number of times over the last couple weeks. Jesus said some hard things. This is the chapter where he said all those the Father gives him will come to him. Before this he fed 5,000 men, plus women and children, all with a little boy's lunch. Look. People want to be fed. Everyone loves the stuff Jesus gives. Then something interesting happens. This is immediately after feeding approximately 15,000 people or so.

> Jn 6:15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.
> John 6:15

It's interesting that they did not reject Jesus' kingdom here; Jesus rejected theirs. Why did they want to make him king? A king who can feed so many with so little is a very

good king, indeed! They wanted all his gifts! That night Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee on foot—walking on water. The disciples were frightened by this but Jesus got them safely across even though the sea was rough. Then the crowds found him again, no doubt wanting breakfast.

Jesus was very direct with them: you didn't search for me because you love me or you trust me or you worship me or you seek to follow me. You searched for me because you're hungry. He tells them he himself is the bread from God. They don't want *that* bread, though. They want "real" bread. It is at this point that Jesus says all the Father gives him will come to him and his Father's will is that he loses none of those whom the Father has given him.

He goes on to tell them they must eat his flesh and drink his blood to receive eternal life. That is, he is their salvation; there is no other way to the Father. Then we read this:

> Jn 6:66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with
> him. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" 68 Simon
> Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal
> life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One
> of God."
>
> John 6:66–69

Many of his disciples left him when the social advantage of "following" him was gone. They didn't want Jesus; they wanted his stuff. When his "stuff" became less valuable, they left. Jesus asked the twelve if they would leave as well. Peter is the one who points out there is no where else for them to go. Jesus and Jesus alone has the words of eternal life.

Where else can we go, church? If we turn away from Scripture and reject its teaching or we add to its teaching or we simply choose to change what it means, we're not turning to something better. We're turning away from the Lord Jesus. We're walking away from him when he alone has the words of eternal life.

In these two letters Peter is calling us to remain faithfully present. Sometimes being faithful to Jesus means being ostracized and hated. In Nigeria more than 50,000 people have been killed over the last several years for being faithful to Jesus. In the last year alone nearly 5,000 have been killed. We're not facing that level of hostility here in our city. Our friends and neighbors may well look down on us for our "backward" and "old-fashioned" views on morality and such.

Where else could we go, New City? Jesus and Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. Remember his promise, the very promise he is not slow to fulfill: all the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to Jesus he will never cast out. The call to us is to remain faithful, whatever it may cost us, for in remaining faithfully present we will be found without spot or blemish, and at peace with God.

Don't do the twist, church. Stick with Jesus. In Jim's words, do the pivot. Pivot to Christ. Pivot only to Christ, for only he has the words of eternal life.