



When Error Leads to Destruction

*¹⁴Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother **Paul**, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶as also **in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.** ¹⁷You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by **the error of unprincipled men** and fall from your own steadfastness, ¹⁸but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. — 2 Peter 3:14–18*

One of the primary reasons that a Holy Spirit-filled, born again Christian is supposed to devote themselves to Scripture, is because it re-educates us where we have been deceived by the world by the very words that we use. Nearly every definition of a term found in God’s Word is manipulated or outright redefined by the world’s dictionary so that it does not resemble that which God’s Word originally intended. And thus we learn the true meaning of such things as “love”, “faith” or “hope” through Scripture, whose respective biblical definitions are a measurable contrast to the world’s meaning. But even lesser, more ordinary words can be misconstrued because we still assume that God’s Word is using them in the fashion most familiar to our worldly upbringing. It would not be unusual to read the above passage and interpret the phrase “*to their own destruction*” as merely meaning, “potentially harmful” or “not beneficial”. That is not how Scripture uses the term “*destruction*” at all. When someone distorts Scripture, the eventual consequences are far more serious than most realize.

The best way to pursue our vocabulary re-education is to first and foremost adhere to the rule that the best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture. Before employing commentaries, our best starting point is a good Bible dictionary and concordance which direct us to the other passages where the same or similar words are used so that we can make a comparison not just of the word itself, but the context in which it is employed.

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Because Greek and Hebrew, like all languages, can use a word spelled the same way but used differently depending on the context, our Bible references usually provide the corresponding assigned Strong's number so we can know that regardless of the English rendering, the underlying word is the same. Again, this is especially helpful in combination with the context of the overall passage in which it is used. In this case, that which is presented in English as "*destruction*" is "*apoleia*" (Strong's #684), and it carries with it not just consequences for this life, but the next as well.

*¹³Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to **destruction**, and there are many who enter through it. — Matthew 7:13*

*³⁹But we are not of those who shrink back to **destruction**, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. — Hebrews 10:39*

*⁷But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and **destruction** of ungodly men. — 2 Peter 3:7*

Do you begin to get the sense of what "*apoleia*"—that is, "*destruction*", is describing? We don't need a whole Sunday morning sermon to provide in excruciating detail what we so readily see in just these three examples. But *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* says it "refers to the state after death wherein exclusion from salvation is a realized fact, wherein man, instead of becoming what he might have been, is lost and ruined". This is expressing a scenario we are all familiar with, that before all souls are sent to hell, a resurrection takes place where all appear before the "*great white throne*" of judgment, "*and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds*". (Rev. 20:11-12) There comes a time when personal consequences are unequivocally understood as the loss and ruin of what might have been. This is the picture of "*destruction*" God's Word is referring to, something in this life leading to consequences for the next life.

The same outcome is scripturally stated for those who are not merely making the wrong personal choices, but who become outright hostile toward Christ:

*¹⁸For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹whose end is **destruction**, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. — Philippians 3:18-19*

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The error of those “*who set their minds on earthly things*” to the exclusion of what really matters is further addressed in God’s Word:

*⁹But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and **destruction**. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. — 1 Timothy 6:9–10*

But this term is not limited in its association to choosing the wrong path, seeking worldly gain to the neglect of the spiritual, nor becoming openly hostile to the Word and ways of Christ. It is the inevitable destination not just of those who embrace false teaching, but espouse it:

*¹But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce **destructive** heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift **destruction** upon themselves. ²Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; ³and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their **destruction** is not asleep. — 2 Peter 2:1–3*

Perhaps the most startling use of the term, however, is when employed as one of the primary definitions of Judas and the Antichrist. The English rendering “*perdition*”, as in the familiar “*son of perdition*” is actually this same word. When used to describe Judas, the NASB translators chose “*perdition*” to emphasize the consequence of the personal destruction that he would experience for the choices of his own actions; by rendering it the “*son of destruction*” for the Antichrist, it provides the dual meaning of not just a personal, inevitable end in eternal destruction, but trying to destroy everyone and everything along the way. These figures act out in their temporal lives on earth the ultimate eternal fate which awaits them.

*¹²“While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the **son of perdition**, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. — John 17:12*

*³Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the **son of destruction**. ⁴who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. — 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4*

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*⁸The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to **destruction**. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. — Revelation 17:8*

So with a much clearer understanding of what “*destruction*” is actually describing, let’s go back to the opening passage where this discussion initiated.

*¹⁴Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother **Paul**, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶as also **in all his letters**, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which **the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction**. ¹⁷You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by **the error of unprincipled men** and fall from your own steadfastness, ¹⁸but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. — 2 Peter 3:14–18*

First of all, the Apostle Peter himself assigns the Apostle Paul’s teachings the status of being part of the Scriptures. False teachers whom Peter specifically describes as being “*untaught and unstable*” to begin with, “*distort, as they do also the rest of Scriptures*” that which “*our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you*”. He further categorizes this effort as “*the error of unprincipled men*”, so that in combination with their being “*untaught and unstable*”, we can see that we’re dealing with those who are not just struggling spiritually or happen to hold to a factual error, but have serious underlying spiritual issues undermining their very life. But Peter is specifically warning that this behavior, the purposeful distortion of Paul’s teachings, has the most serious consequences in the biblical sense of the end result of “*destruction*”.

And notice what their true intent is, which is not just to be “*carried away by the error*”—that is, this is not just an issue of fact-checking the truth of what they teach, but that the real danger is described as the “*fall from your own steadfastness*”. The resulting distortion of Paul’s teachings has tangible spiritual consequences which undermine our spiritual walk. This is not speaking of someone offering a difference of opinion or engaging in an open and frank discussion, but twisting God’s Word as provided through Paul so that it accomplishes the exact opposite of its unadulterated purpose.

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So if you're wondering why I seem to be going off the rails on the theme of eternal destruction at the holiday season, and you've stuck with me to this point, God bless you, and let me explain what has precipitated this. It just seems inevitable that practically every Bible-believing Christian, if they have not already encountered this, will find it crossing their path sooner or later. But we have a growing problem *within* the walls of the Church. We have an increasing number of pastors, scholars, theologians, authors, conference speakers, bloggers and website operators doing to Paul's teachings exactly what Peter is warning us to not just be aware of, but to actively avoid: they are distorting Paul's teachings. And if it were not so egregious, the irony would be the substance of a sitcom sketch, because today's distortion artists are attempting to change the very same Pauline teaching which 1st century personalities attempted to twist, causing Paul to write a whole Epistle in rebuttal in the first place. That which took place in Paul's time is being replayed again.

For those who are fortunate enough to have not had to deal with this yet, you're most likely to furrow your brow and say, "That is so obviously wrong I can't believe anyone would believe it" because it defies the plain text of Scripture, but it is nonetheless championed by some of the most well-known names in Evangelicism today. But it simply revolves around these verses:

*¹Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, ²that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³**Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed**, the son of destruction, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. — 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4*

Let me make this clear from the outset: I am **not** talking about any and every person who holds to the position of Pre-Tribulationism; this is an issue with a growing yet sizable portion *within* that camp. But here is what that popular faction has and is doing: they are saying that the word "apostasy"—here correctly translated from the underlying Greek word "apostasia" (Strong's #4878), no longer refers to "a spiritual falling away" or spiritual departing, but that it needs to be replaced by its root, "aphistemi" (Strong's #868), to instead mean "a physical departing". In other words, in order to make a case that the Church's Rapture occurs before the Antichrist appears, they distort Paul's plain

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teaching by actually replacing the original text of God's Word! They are saying that this now says, "the rapture comes first" rather than the spiritual falling away.

Again, this is not every adherent of Pre-Tribulationism, and when a prominent champion of this position presented it to a large group of like-minded colleagues at their annual meeting a number of years ago, there were those who publicly stood against this assertion. Unfortunately, they have been few, and this egregious revisitation of distorting Paul's teachings is taking an ever-increasing hold of that particular market share.

Notice that Paul wrote this in the very first place because false teachers came behind him, and instead of outright trying to replace his teachings, instead altered the *timing*. They didn't try to say there was no such thing as "the day of the Lord", but rather that it had already come. Presently the very same kind of "error of unprincipled men" (and women) is being replayed yet again. They are attempting to change the time line.

For those who desire to learn the entire soup to nuts explanation of what they are doing and the lengths they have gone to in order to justify this, please read the excruciatingly detailed Walk with the Word commentary, "[When Change Is Expressly Forbidden](#)". But the original purveyors of this violation of Peter's explicit warning even go further by not just quoting sources which don't actually match the quotes which they publish in support of this false assertion, but even attempt to change the text of other English Bibles along the way. It's fraudulent both on the doctrinal and academic levels. How would you grade someone's paper whose footnotes proved the exact opposite of their hypothesis? That is the very situation presented in this case.

This all takes a turn into something beyond outrageous when one studies the proposed substitute "aphistemi" in Scripture itself. Yes, at times it *is* used to describe a physical departure (Lk. 2:37, 4:13; Acts 12:10, etc., etc.), but look at these verses where I've underlined the English rendering of the underlying "aphistemi":

*¹³Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation **fall away**. — Luke 8:13*

*³⁷After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and **drew away** some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. — Acts 5:37*

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*¹But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will **fall away** from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, — 1 Timothy 4:1*

*¹²Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that **falls away** from the living God. — Hebrews 3:12*

To be sure, no one is allowed to substitute words from the original Greek text as they choose and so we must always accept “*apostasia*” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 no matter what, but even if we accommodated their decision to substitute “*aphistemi*”, it is also often used to describe a **spiritual** falling away. This attempt fails not only on every level of scholarly evaluation, but just plain common sense. What would the Apostle Peter tell us upon seeing this? He already has: “*be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men*”. (2 Pe. 3:17)

But it all turned surreal a couple of weeks ago, when a well-known Christian blogging/radio personality broadcast an interview with her fellow compatriots and declared that those not holding to this position are “satanically influenced”. This was specifically stated in the context of her assertion, “There is nowhere in the Bible there’s even hints we should be anticipating the Antichrist as believers”. (I know I should publish her name in a public rebuke, but I don’t even want her to get the satisfaction of seeing the number of views of her videos go up, even if it’s not by viewers who agree with what is being said.)

How ironic that Peter says that their own distortion of Paul’s teachings will lead to their “*destruction*” in the course of their bizarre assertion that there is no biblical proof the Church will ever encounter the “*son of destruction*”. But when you reach down and change the very Word of God, when you purposely misquote supporting sources, and when your assertion is so easily dismantled by a simple examination of the word’s parallel use elsewhere in Scripture, what else should we expect? It becomes quite obvious very quickly that this is not an issue of scholarship, but a betrayal of a much greater underlying spiritual issue in these proponents’ personal lives.

There is certainly room for disagreement where interpretation is concerned for some things, but that which is expressly forbidden by God’s Word? While I do not hold to the proposition of Pre-Tribulationism, I have never, and hope to never, make it an issue of division in and of itself. And what I am referring to here is not exclusively about that or any other position of eschatology. No matter what the doctrine or teaching, **everyone**

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needs to take a stand should it distort God's Word and when its progenitors reach down and mangle the very text. But we need far more faithful shepherds to stand up to them and at least re-state the very position of God's Word, that the consequences of pursuing and upholding this false teachings will be "*to their own destruction*".

In Him,

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