



THE SECULARIZATION OF THE CHURCH AND ITS REFORMATION

TWO KINGDOMS ARE AT WAR, AND EACH USES A DIFFERENT PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE TO INFLUENCE ITS AUDIENCE. THE BATTLE OF THE LAST DAYS IS THEREFORE NOT ONLY THEOLOGICAL; IT IS ALSO PHILOSOPHICAL. IT CONCERNS THE PURPOSE OF KNOWLEDGE, THE ASSUMPTIONS THAT SHAPE IT, AND THE ENDS TOWARD WHICH IT IS DIRECTED.

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The secularization of the Church

Using the Fruit of the Knowledge of Good and Evil to Drive the Work of God

Isaiah-Phillips Akintola | PortalsGate Publications

What the Church Is

For decades we have warned that a wrong definition of the church, held in place by lopsided religious belief and inherited tradition, would do lasting harm among Christians, because it narrows their grasp of biblical spirituality and so frustrates the shared advance of God's purpose, most of all among those He has sent into the marketplace. We are now watching the fruit of that false narrative ripen on a large scale within some of today's frontline ministries, and the fruit traces back to the definition itself.

The word church translates the Greek *ecclesia*, which joins *ek*, meaning out of, with *kaleo*, meaning to call, and it names those who have been called out and gathered for a purpose. In the Greek city the *ecclesia* was the assembly of citizens summoned to govern; it deliberated, settled laws and held its officers to account, so the word carried the sense of representation and oversight over the affairs of a whole society. Luke applies it to the civic assembly at Ephesus, where the town clerk tells the crowd that any further dispute belongs in a lawful assembly (Acts 19:39). The Greek Old Testament had already chosen the same word for Israel gathered at Horeb, where the Lord said, "Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth" (Deuteronomy 4:10), an assembly convened to receive law so that the law could govern a nation's life afterward.

Jesus took up that word when He said, "upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," and He went on to speak of keys, of binding and of loosing (Matthew 16:18-19), which is the vocabulary of authority. In the ancient city the gate was where the elders sat to hear cases and settle matters of law (Ruth 4:1-2), so the promise that the gates of hell will not prevail sets the church's governing counsel against hell's own counsel in the affairs of men.

Matthew records *ecclesia* and not *synagogue*, though *synagogue* was the word already in use for a place of religious gathering, and His hearers, who knew the first word from the city assembly and from Israel at Horeb, would hardly have pictured a meeting set apart from public life. The assignment that follows from the word is to bring the rule of God's kingdom into every sphere of life, especially into the places where people are shaped without knowing it. Jesus taught us to pray that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10), and Paul says the manifold wisdom of God is to be made known through the church to the principalities and powers (Ephesians 3:10).

We gather because Scripture tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25), and the gathering has its own work to do: we pray, we worship, we encourage one another, and we lift up the name of the Most High. Yet the gathering was also meant to be a place of exchange, where kingdom values and ideas cross-pollinate among believers, so that each of us leaves carrying what heaven has said for the field we represent. The church at Antioch shows the pattern.

While its prophets and teachers ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit told them to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He had called them, and after they had fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away (Acts 13:1-3), so that worship at Antioch ended in a sending. Paul describes the same movement when he says that Christ gave His gifts for the perfecting of the saints and for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12), which places the saints' equipping inside the gathering and their labor in the world outside it.

The *ecclesia* is where the philosophy, ideology and competence that make transformation and reformation possible are settled, and where the life of God, His glory and His presence are given room to minister to people, so that their transformation turns into the reform and development of cities and nations. Everything the church builds rests on that frame, and where the frame is unclear, the work built upon it will not carry out the apostolic intention of God, however busy or well attended it becomes. The psalmist asks what the righteous can do if the foundations are destroyed (Psalm 11:3), and the definition of the church is one of those foundations.

What We Mean by Secularization

The word secular comes from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning an age or a generation, and it lines up with the word Paul uses in Romans 12:2, where “this world” translates *aion*, the present age. To secularize the church is to let the present age supply its measures, its methods and its philosophy, so that the assumptions of the culture govern what the church does while Christian language remains on the surface. It happens by degrees, usually with sincere motives, and it rarely announces itself as a departure.

The reason most often given is relevance: if we want to reach the lost, we are told, we must think and operate as the world does. The argument fails on its own terms, because a system carries the purposes of whoever built it, and Jesus called the builder of the world’s system its ruler (John 12:31). Paul refused that road at Corinth, declaring that his speech and preaching did not rest on the enticing words of man’s wisdom, so that the faith of his hearers would stand in the power of God and not in the wisdom of men (1 Corinthians 2:4-5), and he described the weapons of our warfare as mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4). Many who promote the borrowed system as a strategy for winning the world are sincere, and Proverbs has already described their condition: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

An agenda stands behind this drift, and Scripture says so plainly. Paul feared that, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, the minds of the Corinthians would be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3). Extra-biblical teaching and secularized philosophy offered in the name of relevance belong to that long effort to derail the body of Christ, which works by presenting something that looks reasonable and sounds spiritual while quietly changing what the church treats as its foundation.

The first defense is an accurate reading of the Word. Paul told Timothy to study to show himself approved unto God, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15), and he warned that a time would come when people would not endure sound doctrine but would gather teachers around their own desires, having itching ears and turning away from the truth (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Where interpretation is loose, the age supplies the meaning, and a church that has lost the definition of itself will read every text about mission, excellence and influence through the assumptions it has already absorbed.

A Subtle Teaching in the Body of Christ

The clearest expression of this drift is a teaching now spreading through the body of Christ under the cover of professionalism and advancement, and it draws its strength from a complaint that is largely true. For a long season the church excused ignorance and mediocrity wherever spiritual language could be made to stand in for skill, so that poor preparation, careless administration and undisciplined work were carried without correction because someone had prayed over them. Malachi records the Lord refusing an offering that was blind and lame (Malachi 1:8), and Paul required that everything among believers be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40), which tells us the complaint against carelessness has scriptural standing.

The trouble is not in naming the problem. It is in what the proposed cure asks us to set down in order to fix it. Once creativity, productivity and leadership technique become the measure of a ministry, we begin to hear that prayer alone cannot save anyone and that fasting alone changes nothing, statements that sound like realism but are in fact a new standard smuggled in under the old vocabulary. Whoever repeats them has measured truth against a value system that Scripture never issued, and it makes no difference that respected ministries and the voices we call fathers in the faith have said it first, since a conclusion drawn from a false measure inherits the fault of the measure itself.

We have lived through this exchange before. An error on one side gets corrected by pressing hard toward the opposite side, until the correction becomes an error of its own, and the two extremes take turns ruling the same church a generation apart. Christ did not ask us to choose a side; He asked us to keep the whole counsel of God before us and let every part of it answer to every other part. A generation that starved for skill because it feared losing its spirituality is now in danger of raising a generation that starves for the Spirit because it fears losing its edge, and neither generation has yet built what balance would have given them.

Life Is One

Scripture never draws a line between the life we live before God and the life we live at our work, because there is only the one life, and God claims every part of it. Paul told the Corinthians that whether they ate or drank, whatever they did should be done to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31), and he told the Colossians to do their work heartily, as unto the Lord and not unto men (Colossians 3:23). If both instructions are true, then the discipline that shapes a devotional life and the discipline that shapes a craft are branches of a single root, not two separate plantings that happen to grow in the same field.

Every grace, gift, competence and portion of wisdom given to us was given for God's use, which means a skill sharpened for a career was never meant to serve the career alone, any more than a spiritual gift was meant to serve only what happens inside a church service. To divide a believer's life this way is to impose a boundary the Scriptures never drew, and the question worth asking of ourselves is not whether our gifts belong to God on paper, but whether we have quietly built a room inside our own lives where our prayer is not welcome to enter and inspect what happens there.

Gifting and Preparation Travel Together

The first man Scripture names as filled with the Spirit of God was not a prophet standing before a nation but a craftsman bent over his materials. The Lord said of Bezaleel that He had filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, understanding and knowledge, and in every kind of workmanship (Exodus 31:3), and He put it into the hearts of Bezaleel and Aholiab to teach what they knew to others (Exodus 35:34). In the one project of building the tabernacle, the fullness of the Spirit, the skill of the hands and the patience to train another person all belonged together, because the Lord who filled the man did not separate what the man would do with the filling.

The pattern holds everywhere Scripture lets us watch a call take shape. Moses was already learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians and mighty in words and deeds before he ever met God at the bush (Acts 7:22), yet forty years in the wilderness still stood between that learning and his sending, because a gift and its readiness are not the same event. Joshua walked beside Moses through those same wilderness years before he received, at the laying on of hands, a spirit of wisdom of his own (Deuteronomy 34:9).

David kept sheep, played the harp with skill and spoke with prudence long before a kingdom was given to him (1 Samuel 16:18), and the psalmist would later fold both halves of his reign into a single line: he fed Israel according to the integrity of his heart and guided them by the skill of his hands (Psalm 78:72), integrity and skill named together as though one without the other would have been an incomplete king. Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel before he ever stood before Gentiles (Acts 22:3), and he supported that calling with his own hands as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). Peter mended nets before he mended men, and the years he spent walking behind Jesus were the making of him as surely as any classroom could have been.

Joseph's dream came from heaven, and the ground on which that dream would stand was built in the years no one would have called spiritual. In Potiphar's house he learned to run a household (Genesis 39:4), and in a prison cell he learned to manage men under pressure he had not chosen (Genesis 39:22).

When Pharaoh finally weighed him, he did not ask only whether the Spirit of God was in this man, though he asked that (Genesis 41:38); he added that no one else in the land was as discerning and wise (Genesis 41:39). The dream had been given once, in a night; the administrator who could carry it was built across years he had no reason to expect would matter.

Nothing God hands us to carry out an assignment is a lesser thing than the field He is sending us into, because the same God who issued the call also supplies whatever competence the field will demand of us. A believer can receive a true call, carry a real gift, and still import a foreign philosophy to do the very work that call requires, and when that happens the call and the method it is dressed in have come from two different sources answering to two different kingdoms.

Jesus made this a matter of accounting in the parable of the talents, where the master gave five, two and one according to each servant's own ability (Matthew 25:15) and judged the servant who buried his one talent not for lacking five but for burying what he had (Matthew 25:26). Whatever measure of grace, gift or wisdom has come to us was handed to us for increase, not for storage, and Proverbs promises that a man's gift will make room for him and set him before great men (Proverbs 18:16), that the one who is diligent in his work will yet stand before kings (Proverbs 22:29).

Where Prayer and Preparation Meet

To say that prayer alone cannot save us, or that fasting alone accomplishes nothing, is to say something true in a way that leaves the wrong impression, because prayer and fasting were never offered to us as a substitute for skill, only as the access skill cannot buy on its own. Jesus told His disciples plainly that a certain kind of deliverance comes by nothing but prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29), which means there is a kind of need that competence, however excellent, was never built to reach. To trim the place of prayer and the study of the Word from a ministry because they slow down its output is to misjudge what actually produces the results we are chasing.

Acts 6 shows what it looks like when a church refuses to choose between the two. A dispute over the daily distribution of food to widows was, on its face, a logistics problem, yet the apostles did not ask the church to find efficient men; they asked for men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom (Acts 6:3), because they would not hand a spiritual community's care of its poor to hands that were skilled but not full.

The same arrangement that raised up those seven also protected something on the other side of the ledger: the apostles kept themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4), so that neither the practical need nor the spiritual center of the church was made to wait on the other.

Nehemiah gives us the same pattern stretched across a longer season. He wept, fasted and prayed for a broken city before he ever inspected its walls by night (Nehemiah 1:4; 2:12-15), and once the work of rebuilding began, prayer did not step aside for strategy; when enemies threatened the wall, he wrote that they made their prayer to God and set a watch against the enemy day and night (Nehemiah 4:9), the praying and the watching held in a single breath rather than two separate assignments.

Jethro's counsel to Moses ran the same way: he told him to look for able men, and in the same sentence, men who feared God, were truthful, and hated covetousness (Exodus 18:21), as though competence without character had never occurred to him as something worth appointing. Proverbs draws the line for us in one sentence: the horse is prepared for the day of battle, yet safety belongs to the Lord (Proverbs 21:31); we do the readying, and the outcome still answers to Him.

What decides whether a ministry drifts toward one extreme or the other is the measure it has agreed to use. Let a secular standard of output become that measure, and prayer will start to look like a delay we can no longer afford. Let the fear of the Lord remain the measure, which Proverbs calls the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7), and skill and prayer will find they were never competitors to begin with.

Sent Into a World God Has Equipped Us For

Jesus told us to go into all the world and make disciples of every nation (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19), and the word world in that sending covers more ground than we usually credit. It reaches into engineering, medicine, law, the marketplace, education and, in our own generation, into artificial intelligence, and each of these fields carries its own language, its own assumptions and its own way of deciding what counts as reasonable. To be sent into a field is to be sent into its structure, and no one serves faithfully in a structure he has refused to understand.

God does not send anyone into a field without also furnishing what that field will require of him, and He does this by raising up people who already understand the terrain and can translate it for the one He is sending. Daniel shows us this most clearly.

Babylon assigned him to be taught its learning and its language (Daniel 1:4), and Scripture does not credit that education to Babylon alone; it says God Himself gave Daniel and his companions knowledge and skill in every branch of learning and wisdom (Daniel 1:17), so that the king who examined them found them ten times better than every magician and astrologer in his realm (Daniel 1:20). What Babylon taught and what God gave arrived in Daniel as one endowment, not two, though we are quick today to separate what Scripture never separated.

Jeremiah gave the exiles a strange and difficult instruction for the same reason: seek the peace of the city where you have been carried, and pray to the Lord for it (Jeremiah 29:7), one assignment that required them to understand Babylon and to keep praying over Babylon in the same posture. Those who believe themselves sent as apostles to the marketplace stand in good company, since Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah, Lydia the seller of purple (Acts 16:14) and Aquila and Priscilla at their tentmaking (Acts 18:2-3) all labored there before them.

The danger is not the marketplace; it is treating the marketplace as a place where spiritual discernment can be checked at the door because the field seems to run on its own separate logic. Everything we have been given in grace was given to minister to people, and the same believer who serves the church on a Sunday serves the unconverted for the other six days of the week.

One Body of Knowledge, Two Ways of Using It

Education makes the same point in miniature. We need believers in classrooms from kindergarten through the university, not because Christian mathematics differs from any other mathematics, but because a generation shaped entirely by Babylon's values needs somewhere else to learn the same facts inside a different frame of meaning. Physics has one body of knowledge, and so does chemistry and biology; no second multiplication table exists for the believing student. What differs is where the knowledge is aimed once it is learned.

Knowledge of the physical world can be pointed toward the growth of humanity and, beyond that, toward the One who concealed it there to be found. Proverbs tells us it is the glory of God to conceal a matter and the honor of kings to search it out (Proverbs 25:2), and the psalmist wrote that the works of the Lord are studied with delight by everyone who takes pleasure in them (Psalm 111:2), so that careful inquiry into creation is itself a kind of worship when it is aimed rightly. Christ stands behind the whole of it; all things consist in Him (Colossians 1:17), and in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).

Someone will object that Jesus never sat in a university lecture hall, and the objection only proves the point rather than answering it, since He knew all things without one, because all learning was already His before it became anyone else's field of study.

Knowledge gathered this way carries a different destination from knowledge gathered for its own sake. A believing grasp of science, language and history lets a person see past himself toward a cause worth more than his own advancement, so that the very competence he built becomes an instrument in another hand rather than a monument to his own. Paul warned that knowledge puffs up while love builds (1 Corinthians 8:1), which means knowledge without a purpose beyond itself does not stay neutral; it swells whoever is carrying it. We were never meant to gather learning only to be admired for holding it, but to let it carry Christ's redemption further into the world than our own name ever could.

Two Kingdoms and the Battle Over Knowledge

Two kingdoms are contending for the same territory, and both of them are using knowledge as a weapon in that contest, so that the last days will be fought as much in the mind as in any visible arena. Paul told the Colossians that God delivered us out of the power of darkness and carried us into the kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13), which means the change worked in us at conversion was never only a change of religious address; it was a transfer of jurisdiction over how we now decide what is true. He describes the weapons of this warfare as strong enough to pull down every high thing that lifts itself against the knowledge of God and to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), and a battlefield described in terms of imaginations and thoughts is not a battlefield knowledge can sit out.

The contest is older than either kingdom's present form; it began at a tree. God told Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17), and the serpent answered with a different offer entirely: eat, and you will be as gods, knowing good and evil for yourselves (Genesis 3:5). Eve did not reach for the fruit because it looked foolish; she saw that it was to be desired to make one wise (Genesis 3:6). What was offered in the garden was never mere information. It was the right to decide good and evil without reference to God, wisdom detached from its only trustworthy source and answerable instead to human appetite. Wherever knowledge is gathered on those same terms today, competence and achievement can still follow, but they follow another allegiance now, and to build the work of God on knowledge gathered that way is to bring in the method together with the whole spirit that produced it.

That spirit has a long history behind it. Aristotle taught that some human beings were slaves by nature, and Plato ranked the citizens of his Republic by the function each was fit to serve, while Rome built an empire partly on the strategy of dividing the people it meant to rule. Real intellectual achievement came out of all three, and buried inside that achievement was a habit of measuring one person against another by status, capacity and usefulness, a habit that survives wherever education, institutions or even ministries still ask what a person can do for us before they ask who God made that person to be.

Weighed against God's own standard, this inherited wisdom fails for the same reason the garden failed: it prices a human life without reference to the One who gave it. That failure rarely announces itself when it enters a church; it enters instead as a preference for fluency, so that a believer without polish, without a platform and without the right credentials is quietly passed over while the assembly congratulates itself on raising the bar. Excellence, treated this way, stops being stewardship of what God gave and becomes a gate that only the culture's approved can pass through, and a gate built like that is not discernment wearing ministry's clothes; it is ministry wearing the world's clothes and calling the borrowed garment discernment.

Paul gave the Corinthians a different measure entirely. Not many wise, not many mighty, not many of noble birth were called, he told them, because God chose what the world calls foolish in order to put its wise to shame (1 Corinthians 1:26-27). Not many is not the same as none, and Paul himself, trained at Gamaliel's feet, stood inside the exception even as he wrote the rule. What his words settle is not that learning is unwelcome but that God's choosing was never bound to the world's ranking of who is impressive enough to be used.

When Babylon Feeds Us

Babylon has never been stingy with what it offers those who keep eating from its tree. It hands out power, resources and wealth freely to anyone willing to advance its ideology in exchange, and the exchange can look, for a long season, like blessing rather than cost. John saw the merchants of the earth grow rich on the abundance of her luxuries (Revelation 18:3), a wealth that asked nothing of its recipients except continued loyalty to the system that produced it. A believer can walk away from that table with real knowledge and real competence and still find, years later, that both were quietly pulling his heart from the kingdom he thought he was serving.

Babylon's first builders told each other exactly what they were doing: let us build a city and a tower reaching to heaven, and let us make a name for ourselves (Genesis 11:4). Their engineering was genuine and their cooperation was real, and both were aimed at one destination, which was themselves. Every generation since has found its own version of that tower, a place where skill becomes a platform for making a name and knowledge becomes a tool the self can use on itself.

Many who now minister were trained in Babylon's universities before they ever met Christ, and some of them still reach for the ideology that came bundled with that training when they set out to build something for Him. The training was a genuine gift; the worldview riding along with it was not, and where that worldview becomes the actual method of ministry rather than a tool submitted to a different lord, it produces exactly what it was built to produce: larger numbers, wider platforms, more money, and none of the touch of God that a church cannot manufacture no matter how well it is run. A church that has learned to sound like the world in order to be taken seriously by the world will collect the world's rewards and lose, without quite noticing the moment it happened, its power to change the world at all.

Paul described people who are always learning and never able to arrive at the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:7), a whole life spent in motion toward a destination the traveler somehow never reaches. The Athenians Paul met in Acts spent their days doing nothing but telling and hearing some new thing (Acts 17:21), a city addicted to novelty rather than truth, and Paul walked straight into the middle of it, quoted their own poets back to them (Acts 17:28), and preached Christ without once letting their assumptions become his own.

Knowledge From Above

James names the two sources plainly. One wisdom does not descend from above at all; it is earthly, sensual and demonic (James 3:15). The other is pure first, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruit, without partiality and without pretense (James 3:17), and a wisdom without partiality is already answering the class-bound thinking we traced back to Athens and Rome, since it will not rank one person above another by status before it has even finished speaking.

We see this wisdom most clearly in the people the established order was least prepared to credit with it. When Peter and John stood before the rulers, those rulers judged them unlearned and ignorant men, and then, in the same breath, marveled and recognized that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13), an education the council had no framework to explain and could not therefore dismiss once they saw its fruit. The Pharisees present us with the

opposite case: men who searched the Scriptures constantly, certain that the searching itself was eternal life, and Jesus told them plainly that the very Scriptures they searched testified of Him and that they still would not come to Him for the life they claimed to be seeking (John 5:39-40). It is possible, in other words, to know a text with real precision and still miss the One the text was written to introduce, and Jesus charged the lawyers of His day with exactly this, that they had taken away the key of knowledge without ever using it to open the door (Luke 11:52).

Belshazzar's banquet hall settles the matter beyond argument. A hand wrote on the wall, and Babylon's whole college of wise men could not read what it had written, let alone interpret it for the king (Daniel 5:8), the best-trained minds in the empire standing helpless in front of four words. It was the queen who remembered Daniel, in whom an excellent spirit had been found, along with knowledge, understanding and the ability to interpret dreams and solve hard problems others could not touch (Daniel 5:12).

Daniel had learned everything Babylon had to teach him, yet the knowledge that finally read the wall belonged to the One who gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who already have understanding (Daniel 2:21), which is to say it came from above, and every good and perfect gift, James tells us, comes from nowhere else (James 1:17).

The Mountain of the Lord's House

Isaiah saw the mountain of the Lord's house established above every other mountain, with the nations streaming toward it (Isaiah 2:2), a vision that only makes sense if other mountains are also standing there competing for the same traffic. Babylon is one of those mountains, and Jeremiah names it plainly as a destroying mountain that has laid waste to the whole earth (Jeremiah 51:25). One mountain rises by gathering power to itself; the other is lifted up because the Lord Himself has chosen to dwell there, and Scripture's promise is not that the two will coexist indefinitely but that one of them will stand exalted above every rival claim to wisdom and authority.

What will actually turn the nations is not a church that has learned to sound exactly like Babylon in a slightly more religious accent. Intellectual power, technical skill and institutional strength all have their place, and none of them can substitute for the presence and the word of the Lord, which is the very thing the nations were promised when they came seeking instruction they could find nowhere else (Isaiah 2:3). Downplaying the gifting, grace, wisdom and faithful ministry God supplies while quietly elevating secular competence as though it were sufficient on its own is not a harmless adjustment of emphasis.

Paul warned Timothy that in the latter times some would depart from the faith by giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1), and deception of this kind rarely announces itself by denying the faith outright. It simply reorders what we treat as essential until what Scripture calls central has quietly become optional.

We are living in exactly the days Paul warned Timothy about, perilous not because danger is loud but because the god of this age has learned to blind minds without anyone noticing the blindfold (2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:1). The Bereans give us the only safe posture left to us: they received the word eagerly and still searched the Scriptures daily to see whether it was so (Acts 17:11), and they did this with an apostle standing in front of them.

If Paul's own preaching was tested against the written word rather than exempted from it, then every teaching that reaches us now, however respected its source, can undergo the same examination. Prove all things, Paul told the Thessalonians, and hold fast only to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21), which leaves us with no shortcut, only the ongoing work of measuring what we are told against what has already been written.

Built to Impress the World or Built to House His Presence

Solomon's temple stands as the clearest picture Scripture gives us of human skill placed entirely at God's disposal, and its construction reached a level of precision that still startles anyone who reads it closely: the stones were made ready before they ever arrived at the site, so completely that neither hammer, axe nor any tool of iron was heard while the house was being built (1 Kings 6:7). No engineer today would call that primitive. It was excellence pressed to its outer limit, every measurement settled before the first stone was laid, so that the building itself rose in something close to silence.

When the temple was finished and the Lord came to answer Solomon's dedication, He did not comment on the workmanship at all. He said He had consecrated the house Solomon built, that His name would be there forever and His eyes and His heart perpetually (1 Kings 9:3), and then He attached a condition that had nothing to do with stonework: if Solomon or his sons turned aside from following Him to serve other gods, Israel would be cut off from the land, and the house itself, this masterpiece of ancient engineering, would become a heap of rubble, an astonishment and a byword among the nations who once admired it (1 Kings 9:6-9). The Lord evaluated the temple by what would live inside it, not by what had been built around that space.

History did not wait long to show what the warning meant. The same structure whose stones fitted together without the sound of a single tool became, within a few generations, the house Jeremiah confronted on God's behalf, asking Israel whether this house, called by His name, had become in their sight a den of robbers (Jeremiah 7:11), the same charge Jesus repeated with a whip in His hand centuries later (Matthew 21:13). Excellence of construction had not moved. What had moved was the heart of the people gathering inside it, and that alone was enough to turn a wonder of engineering into a byword.

This is why Isaiah's mountain of the house of the God of Jacob draws the nations by something other than its architecture (Isaiah 2:2-3). Solomon's temple, for all its precision, could not by itself qualify as that mountain, because what Isaiah saw exalted above every hill was not a structure but a dwelling, a place defined by whose presence filled it rather than by whose skill had raised it. A house can be the most impressive building of its age and still, for want of that one thing, be nothing more than expensive stone.

Whatever we build, however loudly the world reports on it, was never being measured by whether it wowed the world. It was only ever being measured by whether it carried the presence of God well enough to produce, inside the people who gathered there, the very transformation the world cannot manufacture for itself. Are we building to impress the world, or are we building to house the glory of the Lord?