



ASK The THEOLOGIAN

with Dr. Randy White

Solid Answers to Bible Questions

Ask The Theologian *Journal*

Volume 1
Number 9
September 2026

Ask The Theologian Journal
Vol. 1, Number 9, September 2026

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Published by:
Dispensational Publishing House
P.O. Box 3181
Taos, NM 87571
www.dispensationalpublishing.com

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (KJV).

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Printed in the United States of America

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Introduction

Welcome to the September 2026 issue of the *Ask The Theologian Journal*. This ninth issue of Volume 1 gathers 53 questions and answers from 12 broadcasts, September 14–30. The discussions move from close readings of biblical passages to questions about ministry, church life, and the use of study tools. Their recurring purpose is to examine familiar claims in light of Scripture and to distinguish the audiences, settings, and dispensational contexts of the biblical text.

A central thread concerns Israel, Gentiles, and the body of Christ. Questions explore Jacob's adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh, the olive tree in Romans 11, the one new man, the identity of saints and faithful believers in Ephesians, and the audiences addressed in First Corinthians. Related answers consider prophecy and mystery, the boundaries of dispensations, the distinction between law and grace, and claims about earthly and heavenly hopes.

Salvation and repentance receive sustained attention. Readers will find discussions of Acts 2:38 and Acts 26, repentance under the Mosaic law, Free Grace theology and Lordship Salvation, and the relationship of works to the messages addressed to different biblical audiences. These conversations return repeatedly to the need to interpret a passage in its own setting before drawing conclusions for the present dispensation.

Other questions address suffering, natural disasters, wrath and the curse on creation, eternal judgment, the catching up of believers, and Christ's millennial rule. The issue also examines the birth narratives, Pentecost, theophanies, the original human language, and Joel's army. Questions about Bible wording, textual criticism, modern translations, and online study tools illustrate both the value and the limits of resources used alongside Scripture.

Practical discussions round out the issue: choosing a spouse, anger and family conflict, Christian resilience, preaching ministry, liturgy, church health, and growth through learning and edification. A conversation about artificial intelligence and songwriting considers how technology can assist creative work. Together, these chapters preserve theology worked out in conversation, with assumptions examined and the biblical text kept at the center.

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1 Jacob's Legal Adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh

Question

Why did Israel or Jacob the man take Joseph's sons Manassa and Ephraim as his own?

This is based on Genesis 48:5: "And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manassa, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine." This is Israel or Jacob speaking to Joseph. I am going to take your sons and I am going to take them as mine.

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Answer

Jacob's action in Genesis 48:5 appears to be a formal, legal adoption rather than a sentimental gesture. He declares that Ephraim and Manasseh are to be regarded "as Reuben and Simeon," that is, as full sons with standing equal to his first and second born. This is best understood in terms of inheritance and tribal status within Israel.

In the ancient Near Eastern setting, inheritance normally flowed to sons, not to grandsons directly. By adopting Joseph's two oldest sons as his own, Jacob ensured that Joseph's line would receive a double portion. Instead of there being one tribe of Joseph, there would be two full tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, each with its own inheritance. This explains why, in the tribal listings, Ephraim and Manasseh commonly appear as distinct tribes, not "half-tribes" in any substantive sense.

Inheritance, tribal structure, and legal standing

The language of Genesis 48 suggests a legal transaction. Ephraim and Manasseh remain, in a natural sense, Joseph's sons, yet Jacob's declaration places them in the line of direct heirs. Each will have territory and a tribal identity under his own name. This is the mechanism by which Joseph receives a double portion among the tribes.

There may also be an implicit concern about whether the inheritance could pass to grandsons born outside the land. Jacob states that these two were born "in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt." Since they were born in Egypt to a mother of Egyptian background, one could later argue that they are not fully within the covenant people and therefore not fit to receive a tribal allotment in Canaan. Jacob preempts such

an objection by explicitly naming them as his sons and attaching his own name to them.

The blessing and the prominence of Ephraim

The subsequent blessing clarifies Jacob's intention. In Genesis 48:13–16 Joseph positions Manasseh, the firstborn, at Jacob's right hand and Ephraim, the younger, at his left. Jacob deliberately crosses his hands:

“And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manassa's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manassa was the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them

grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

Verse 16 is particularly significant. Jacob wants “my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac.” He is consciously placing the patriarchal line and the covenantal identity upon these two grandsons. Given that their mother is Egyptian, this act firmly situates them within Israel rather than Egypt. Had Jacob not done this, one could argue that a future “tribe of Joseph” would lack qualified heirs because Joseph's sons were born of an Egyptian mother.

Ephraim, although the younger, receives the right-hand blessing and becomes especially prominent. Later, the name Ephraim is used at times as a designation for the northern kingdom, effectively standing in for “Israel” (for example, in Hosea). This confirms the far-reaching nature of Jacob's blessing and the tribal significance of this adoption.

In summary, Jacob's adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh is best seen as a deliberate legal action to grant Joseph a double portion, to secure full tribal and inheritance rights for two grandsons born in Egypt to an Egyptian mother, and to bind them unmistakably to the patriarchal line by placing his own name upon them.

2 Artificial Intelligence and the Craft of Songwriting

Question

We greatly enjoyed your ballad and wonder if AI created the whole thing or did you write the lyrics and engage AI to put it in music? Impressive either way.

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Answer

The piece in question was created through a combination of human direction and artificial intelligence tools. AI did not autonomously generate the entire work; rather, I used AI as an aid in both lyric shaping and musical setting under my oversight.

Typically, I begin with the lyrics. I tell the AI system what I want the song to be about, the style I am aiming for (for example, an old ballad or a country song), and key details that must be included. The AI will then propose lyrics. Those first drafts almost always need revision. Sometimes the rhymes push the content in the wrong direction, or the wording is inaccurate, or proper names are mispronounced. I then tweak the lines, redirect the emphasis, and have the system regenerate sections until the content and flow match my intent.

Meter is another area that often demands substantial hands-on work, especially for hymns. For a hymn tune, you need consistent syllable counts and stresses across all verses so that each stanza can be sung to the same melody. AI can quickly produce additional verses,

but it often varies the meter in ways that do not fit a fixed hymn tune. That requires deliberate editing and iteration to get all verses into a common pattern (such as common meter).

Once the lyrics are in acceptable shape, I describe the musical style I want, and the AI generates music accordingly. Sometimes the first musical setting works well; other times it feels too formal, too “high church,” or too heavy in a particular instrument, and I send it back for adjustment. It can take multiple passes to get a musical backing that truly matches the lyrical and stylistic goals.

On AI as a creative tool and authorship

If I were a professional musician or songwriter, I would see AI as a powerful tool rather than a threat. It can speed up ideation and help generate raw material, but bringing a piece to a level where you would sign your name requires judgment, refinement, and intentional direction.

From the standpoint of authorship, the human user is the creative agent. The system does not generate works in a vacuum;

it responds to instructions, constraints, corrections, and tastes that the human provides. In that sense it is comparable to using any sophisticated tool: a machinist with advanced equipment or an artisan using automated cutting devices still rightly

claims authorship over the finished product. Likewise, when someone directs an AI system with specific prompts, revises its output, and shapes the final form, that person bears responsibility for and ownership of the work.



3 Reconciling the Birth Narratives of Matthew and Luke

Question

I have a question about the apparent contradiction that is brought to us by several atheists regarding the birth story of Jesus.

First, the atheists claim that both Matthew and Luke contradict each other as in Luke 2:22–39, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus go to the temple for the purification laws and finally settle in Nazareth. However, in Matthew 2:1–13, Jesus was first brought to Egypt and then his family settled back in Nazareth with no mention of events recorded in Luke 2. To conclude, the atheists and the skeptics of the Bible try to use this contradiction to prove that the Bible is full of errors and not the word of God.

September 14, 2026

Answer

The issue you raise is often framed as a contradiction between Matthew and Luke, but the tension arises more from traditional Christian harmonizations than from the texts themselves. If we let each Gospel speak for itself, the accounts can

be read together without forcing them into mutual exclusion.

Luke 2:22–39 describes the presentation of Jesus in the temple at the time of Mary's purification, which, according to the law of Moses, would be about forty

days after birth. They come to Jerusalem, fulfill the requirements, encounter Simeon and Anna, and then, Luke says, “when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth” (Luke 2:39). Luke makes no mention of a sojourn in Egypt; but silence about an additional episode is not, in itself, evidence of contradiction.

Matthew 2, on the other hand, emphasizes different events. After the visit of the magi and the warning in a dream, Joseph is told:

“Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.”
(Matthew 2:13)

Matthew adds that Joseph “was there until the death of Herod” (Matthew 2:15). The text does not specify how long that stay lasted.

Timing and duration of the stay in Egypt

Many popular retellings assume that the family remained in Egypt two years because Herod killed all boys in Bethlehem “from two years old and under” (Matthew 2:16). But that verse does not state the length of their residence in Egypt; it only reports the age range Herod targeted based on when he had first inquired about the star.

Moreover, the narrative allows for a relatively brief stay in Egypt. Travel from Judea into the Egyptian territory of the same empire would not have required months of journeying. Herod, according to historical sources, was violently unstable in his last days and capable of extreme actions even shortly before his death. There is no textual obstacle to understanding “until the death of Herod” as a period that could have been relatively short.

If we place Matthew and Luke side by side, one plausible reconstruction is this: Jesus is born in Bethlehem; within a relatively short time the events of the magi and Herod’s threat unfold; Joseph takes the family briefly into Egypt in obedience to the warning; when news of Herod’s death is received, they return to the land, fulfill the requirements of the law in Jerusalem (as Luke records), and then settle in Nazareth in Galilee. Luke focuses on the fulfillment of the law and the move to Nazareth; Matthew focuses on the threat from Herod, the flight into Egypt, and the return as fulfillment of prophecy.

Apparent versus actual contradiction

If we insist that Matthew requires a years-long stay in Egypt that spans the time of the purification and precludes any visit to Jerusalem, we then create a clash with Luke. But that insistence goes beyond what the text of Matthew actually says; it imports a traditional timeline back into the passage and then treats that imported

reconstruction as if it were part of inspired Scripture.

When we restrict ourselves to the explicit statements of the two Gospels, we see:

- Luke affirms a visit to the temple at about forty days and a subsequent move to Nazareth.
- Matthew affirms a flight to Egypt and a stay there until Herod's death, with a later settlement in Nazareth.
- Neither Gospel explicitly denies the events the other records.

The alleged contradiction is therefore not inherent in the biblical accounts but arises from reading extra details into one account and then using those extras to attack the other. The better approach is to allow each evangelist to select and arrange material according to his purpose, acknowledging that both can be accurate without recording every event in the early life of Jesus.



4 Paul's Physical Appearance and the Limits of Tradition

Question

I've always heard that Paul was potentially bald and short. I see no reason to think that the bald part at least is a problem, but I never knew where those claims come from. Paul does make several references to his appearance like 2 Corinthians 10:10 or Galatians 4:13, but I don't think any of them are directly about his height. Have you ever heard this or studied it before?

September 14, 2026

Answer

There is a long-standing traditional picture of Paul as a short, balding man, sometimes even more exaggerated in later descriptions. However, when we ask what can be established from Scripture itself, the answer is that we have no reliable, inspired description of his physical stature or hair.

Scriptural references often misused

Two passages are commonly cited in this discussion:

“For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.”
(2 Corinthians 10:10)

Here Paul reports what some critics say about him. The contrast is between the force of his letters and the impression he makes in person. “Weighty” in reference to his letters is clearly figurative, describing their seriousness and impact, not their mass. To take “bodily presence is weak” as a literal comment on his height or build, while reading “weighty” metaphorically in the same sentence, is inconsistent. It is more reasonable to understand “weak bodily presence” as a perception of his demeanor and personal impression, not a technical description of physical measurements.

The other passage is:

“Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached

the gospel unto you at the first.” (Galatians 4:13)

This speaks of some bodily ailment at the time of his initial visit to the Galatians, but it does not specify what the infirmity was, nor does it suggest a permanent condition such as baldness or a particular height. A temporary illness or weakness would fit naturally with the wording “at the first.”

Later traditions and apocryphal descriptions

The more detailed pictures of Paul as small, bald, bowlegged, with a prominent nose and a unibrow come from much later and non-canonical sources, such as the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, usually dated to the late second century. That work describes Paul in these terms, but it is not part of Scripture and cannot be treated as historically secure in the same way. It may, however, be the root of many artistic depictions that portray Paul as bald and of small stature.

The Latin name *Paulus* is related to a word meaning “small,” and some have inferred from this that Paul must have been short. Yet names frequently bear no literal relation to physical traits. There are surely tall men named Paul just as there are short men with other names.

What we can and cannot say

Putting all this together, we can say that:

- Scripture does not provide a direct physical description of Paul.
- The verses sometimes used to infer his height or hair are better read as comments on perceived personal presence or temporary infirmity, not as anatomical notes.
- Later descriptions in apocryphal literature influenced tradition and art, but they lack the authority and reliability of canonical Scripture.

The responsible conclusion is that we do not know what Paul looked like. Any confident assertions about his baldness or stature go beyond the biblical record. This serves as a reminder to distinguish carefully between tradition, artistic convention, and what the text of Scripture actually states.



5 Spirit Reception Before and At Pentecost

Question

How do you reconcile John 20:22 and 24 with Acts 1:5?

John 20:22: “And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.”

John 20:24: “But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.”

Acts 1:5: “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”

September 14, 2026

Answer

At first glance, John 20:22 and Acts 1:5 seem to present a tension: in John, the risen Christ breathes on the disciples and says, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” while in Acts, shortly before the ascension, he promises, “ye shall be baptized with the

Holy Ghost not many days hence.” The key to reconciliation lies in recognizing distinct operations of the Spirit in different contexts rather than collapsing all Spirit-language into a single event.

John 20:22 as an apostolic bestowal

In John 20, Jesus appears to the disciples after the resurrection, commissions them, and then:

“he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” (John 20:22–23)

This scene is tightly linked to apostolic authority: they are being entrusted with a representative role in relation to forgiveness and retention of sins. It is reasonable to see this as a bestowal of the Spirit in a manner analogous to Old Testament anointings for particular offices or tasks (for example, judges, kings, or prophets receiving the Spirit for their work). It is focused on the apostles’ commission rather than on the formation of a large Spirit-indwelt community.

Thomas is not present in this moment (John 20:24), which raises questions about how and when he is included. Scripture does not directly narrate a parallel act for Thomas, but his later participation among the apostles implies that he, too, comes under the same apostolic endowment, whether by an unrecorded episode or by inclusion in a subsequent work of the Spirit.

Acts 1:5 and the Pentecostal baptism

In Acts 1, Jesus speaks of another work of the Spirit:

“For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” (Acts 1:5)

This is fulfilled in Acts 2, where the Spirit comes upon the gathered group, accompanied by audible and visible signs, and the community as a whole is empowered for prophetic witness. This event is commonly understood as the beginning of the fulfillment of Joel 2, in which the Spirit is poured out upon “all flesh” within the prophetic framework.

The nature of this baptism is corporate and prophetic. It is experienced by the broader “little flock” of believing Jews, not exclusively by the Twelve. It marks a new stage in the history of Israel’s relationship to the Spirit.

Distinguishing the operations

To reconcile John 20 and Acts 1, it is helpful to distinguish at least three different Spirit-related operations in the New Testament:

1. **Apostolic endowment** (John 20:22): A bestowal of the Holy Spirit associated with apostolic office and authority, similar in pattern to Old Testament anointings for specific roles.
2. **Prophetic Pentecostal baptism** (Acts 1:5; Acts 2): A corporate outpouring of the Spirit upon the believing remnant of Israel, fulfilling prophetic promises and empow-

ering them for witness as a Spirit-filled community.

3. **Mystery-body baptism** (1 Corinthians 12:13): “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free.” This is the Spirit’s work in uniting Jews and Gentiles into the one body associated with the Pauline mystery.

When these distinct aspects are conflated, John 20 and Acts 1 appear contradictory. When they are properly distin-

guished, John 20 speaks of an apostolic reception of the Spirit for their particular ministry, while Acts 1:5 points forward to a broader, prophetic baptism of the Spirit upon the community at Pentecost.

On this reading, both statements of Jesus are true and coherent. In John 20, the apostles do genuinely “receive the Holy Ghost” in connection with their office; in Acts 1, they are promised participation in a different, community-wide baptism of the Spirit “not many days hence.” Luke and John are describing different but related operations of the same Spirit in the unfolding of God’s purposes.



6 Repentance, Works, and Paul’s Early Ministry in Acts 26

Question

Does Acts 26:20 teach repentance from sins? What’s the context?

Acts 26:20: “But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

September 14, 2026

Answer

Acts 26:20, taken in its own terms, clearly does present a call to repentance that includes both an inner turning and outward works consistent with that repentance: “that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” This is not the by-grace-through-faith-without-works gospel later articulated in Paul’s mystery teaching. The crucial issue is the historical and theological context of the ministry Paul is summarizing.

The setting: Paul before Agrippa

In Acts 26 Paul is defending himself before King Agrippa. He recounts his encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road and the commission he received. In verses 16–18, he quotes what the Lord said to him:

“But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them

which are sanctified by faith that is in me.” (Acts 26:16–18)

This language is saturated with covenant and prophetic terminology: forgiveness of sins, inheritance, sanctification, and turning from darkness to light. “Inheritance” is legal covenant language; it belongs to a particular sanctified people. “Sanctified by faith that is in me” fits well with the requirement that the covenant people exercise faith in their Messiah. It does not, by itself, define the later mystery gospel.

When Paul then says in verse 20 that he preached “that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance,” he is describing his activity under this commission as it stood at that time, which is in continuity with the kingdom proclamation associated with Peter and the Twelve.

Relation to the kingdom message

The content of Acts 26:20 parallels what we see in Peter’s preaching. For example, Peter calls Israel to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins in Acts 2:38 and speaks of sins being blotted out in connection with repentance in Acts 3:19. The inclusion of “works meet for repentance” in Acts 26:20 is entirely consistent with a kingdom-oriented message in which repentance, visible faithfulness, and readiness for the promised kingdom are stressed.

The danger arises when this language is read as if it were a direct exposition of the later mystery gospel of grace. If one takes Acts 26:20 as a timeless, normative summary of Paul's message in all phases of his ministry, and then tries to harmonize it with his clear statements about justification apart from works in letters like Romans and Galatians, significant theological confusion results.

Rightly dividing Paul's ministry

A better approach is to recognize development and distinction within Paul's ministry. In Acts 26 he is describing his early work from Damascus onward, under a commission that aligns with the broader kingdom program: he is sent "to the people and to the Gentiles" to bring them into the sphere where they may receive forgiveness and inheritance among the sanctified

people. This involves repentance, turning to God, and works suitable to repentance.

Later, with the revelation of the mystery and the explicit teaching that Jews and Gentiles are united in one body and justified by grace through faith apart from works of law, Paul articulates the distinct gospel of the uncircumcision. That later teaching does not rest on a requirement of demonstrable works as a condition of receiving justification.

Therefore, Acts 26:20 does indeed teach repentance that includes works fitting repentance, but it does so within the framework of Paul's kingdom-related ministry as he recounts it to Agrippa. It must not be lifted out of that context and made to define the content of the mystery gospel. Rightly dividing the word requires us to distinguish Paul's early, kingdom-connected proclamation from his later, fully developed statement of the grace gospel revealed to him.



7 The Problem of Suffering and Human Dominion Over Creation

Question

Why didn't God protect those in Nepal instead of simply watching what happened?

September 15, 2026

Answer

When we ask why God did not protect people in a particular disaster, such as the flooding in Nepal, we are often asking for two things at once that do not fit together: we want genuine human freedom and responsibility, and we also want God to intervene whenever that freedom and responsibility would lead to pain, loss, or inconvenience.

We want the ability to make our own decisions without God constantly manipulating our lives, but we also want God to manipulate the created order (such as the weather) whenever it would benefit us. We can imagine a God who always ensures good weather for our picnic while giving the farmer next door the rain he needs, but that is not how God has ordered the present world.

In Scripture there has never been an era in which God universally prevented all temporal suffering, disaster, and danger. He has intervened at points in history according to His purposes, but the ordinary pattern is that people live within a cursed creation and experience its perils. God sees and knows all of this; His failure to stop it does not mean He approves of it, originated it, or delights in it.

Consider the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 he writes:

“Are they ministers of Christ?
(I speak as a fool) I am more;
in labours more abundant,
in stripes above measure, in
prisons more frequent, in

deaths oft. Of the Jews five
times received I forty

stripes

save one. Thrice was I beaten
with rods, once was I stoned,
thrice I suffered shipwreck, a
night and a day I have been
in the deep; In journeyings
often, in perils of waters, in
perils of robbers, in perils
by mine own countrymen, in
perils by the heathen, in per-
ils in the city, in perils in
the wilderness, in perils in
the sea, in perils among false
brethren.”

At least some of these sufferings, especially the shipwrecks and “perils of waters,” arose not from human malice but from the hazards of weather and travel in a fallen world. We can ask of Paul what we ask of Nepal: why did God not protect him instead of “watching it happen”? Yet God allowed Paul to experience repeated, severe dangers.

The biblical picture is that God has given humanity dominion over the earth. That dominion includes real responsibility to understand creation’s dangers and to mitigate them as best we can. Many of the perils we face are bound up with the curse on the earth; we cannot remove that curse, but within it we are accountable for

wise stewardship and protection of human life.

This introduces the role of human society and government. Some regions, like Nepal, face inherently dangerous conditions—monsoons, flooding, unstable terrain. Other regions face hurricanes, flash floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, or wildfires. We cannot stop such phenomena, but we can reduce their lethal impact. Building codes, land-use planning, drainage systems, levees, evacuation procedures, and education are examples of responsible dominion. When governments neglect these responsibilities, disaster mortality and damage are magnified.

In various parts of the world, including Western nations, governments sometimes expend vast energy and resources on symbolic or trivial matters while ignoring structural issues that make their people vulnerable to catastrophe. When this happens, it is unjust to fault God for consequences that arise from human failure to use the dominion He entrusted to us.

There is also an individual component. Those who live in forests must think about fire. Those in flood-prone areas must

think about drainage and defensible space. Dominion is exercised personally as well as collectively. We can, of course, regulate and protect to such an extreme that life and livelihood become impossible, but that is a different kind of failure.

The desire to place all of this burden on “providence” is, in effect, a desire to shift responsibility away from humanity. We want God to give us dominion, and then we want to blame Him when we have not exercised it wisely. Scripture instead presents God as giving a real, ordered world under a real curse, and placing real stewardship into human hands.

Compassion for those who suffer in places like Nepal is entirely appropriate and necessary. But alongside compassion we must affirm that God’s usual way in this age is not to prevent every tragedy, but to hold humanity responsible to use knowledge, foresight, and authority to protect life as far as is realistically possible. Wanting God to override this order every time there is danger amounts to wanting a different world than the one He has revealed—a world in which human dominion and responsibility are largely illusions.

8 Right Division as a Hermeneutical Method in Lay Terms

Question

What is a right divider in layman's terms?

September 15, 2026

Answer

The phrase “right divider” is in-house language used by people who emphasize a particular way of studying Scripture. It comes from 2 Timothy 2:15:

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

The command is to study, and the manner of studying is “rightly dividing the word of truth.” In the King James, “rightly dividing” translates a Greek term built from *ortho* (straight, correct) and a root for cutting. The picture is of making a straight, accurate cut—dividing things along proper lines.

In lay terms, a “right divider” is someone who believes you must distinguish between different parts of the Bible and recognize that not every part applies to every person in the same way. Scripture is not a homogeneous block where every instruction is directed to everyone in all times. It contains different covenants,

different audiences, and different administrations of God's dealings.

Distinguishing Sections of Scripture

Right division asks questions such as:

- To whom was this passage originally spoken (Israel as a nation, the church, Gentile nations, a particular individual)?
- Under what covenant or arrangement was it given (for example, the Mosaic law versus the present age of grace)?
- Is this instruction tied to Israel's national promises, or is it part of the distinct revelation given to the body of Christ through Paul?

For example, Israel under the law was bound by detailed dietary regulations. Paul later writes to believers that they may eat freely, not being under the law. If we simply blend those passages without distinction, we get a contradiction. A right divider concludes that certain commands were given to Israel as a covenant nation and are not binding on the present-day body of Christ.

An Example from the Sermon on the Mount

Consider Matthew 5:5:

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

If we apply this directly to present Christian experience in a literal, economic sense, it contradicts observable reality. Meek people do not, as a class, own the most land; often, powerful and aggressive people do. To make it fit the church, teachers often spiritualize: “inherit the earth” becomes “have a special appreciation for creation,” or some similar notion, which the text itself does not say.

A right divider instead asks: to whom was this promise made? In its context, the Sermon on the Mount concerns Israel and the promised earthly kingdom. Israel’s hope is a restored earth under Messiah’s rule, with the arrogant removed and the faithful remnant inheriting the land in a concrete, territorial way. Taken this way, the promise fits Israel’s prophetic program without distortion.

If one insists that Matthew 5:5 is directly for the church and then spiritualizes

it to avoid conflict with experience, right dividers would say the text has been mis-handled.

Right Division and the Church

Right dividers emphasize that the present body of Christ is not Israel, is not under Israel’s covenants, and is not under the Mosaic law. There are instructions, promises, and threats in Scripture that pertain to Israel’s national program and not to the present dispensation. Conversely, the distinct revelation given through Paul about justification by grace through faith apart from the law, our position in Christ, and our heavenly destiny is addressed to the church.

In everyday language, then: a “right divider” is simply someone who studies the Bible by carefully separating what belongs to which group and era, so that commands and promises are not misapplied. This method preserves the authority of Scripture by letting each passage speak in its proper context instead of forcing it into a theological system where it does not naturally fit.

9 Questioning and Evaluating King James Bible Wording

Question

How would you respond to someone who considers it heresy to question any KJV wording? May we examine added words in parentheses here. How about Easter versus Passover in Acts 12:4, whether Romans 3:26 should read faith of Jesus as in verse 22 rather than faith in Jesus. What would you say to them? There may be more blatant differences between the Textus Receptus and the King James Version, but I don't know.

September 15, 2026

Answer

One can strongly advocate the King James Version and still insist that its wording should be examined and tested. Treating any questioning of the KJV as “heresy” misunderstands both the nature of translation and the way truth is confirmed.

I believe it is healthy, not sinful, to question every wording in the KJV and every underlying Greek or Hebrew form, precisely because I have confidence that careful testing will confirm the reliability of the text and translation. If something is true and robust, it can stand examination. Refusing to allow questions fosters a cult-like atmosphere and drives serious-minded people away.

Italicized Words and Translator Decisions

The KJV uses italics to mark words supplied by the translators which are not di-

rectly represented by a specific word in the original, but are required for clear English. For example, in the Beatitudes the verb “are” is supplied: “Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

English normally requires some form of “to be” in such sentences. The Greek structure allows the sense without an explicit verb. The translators, aware of this, inserted “are” and signaled the insertion with italics. They did not claim new inspiration; they acknowledged a committee-level judgment.

Believers are free to examine these insertions. One might ask: would “Blessed will be the meek” change the sense or violate Greek grammar? It is precisely because the KJV transparently marks such decisions that it invites thoughtful scrutiny. Examining these choices is not an attack

on Scripture but an exercise in understanding how translation functions.

Easter versus Passover in Acts 12:4

Acts 12:4 reads:

“And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.”

Some object: in the days of the apostles, Christians were not yet celebrating what we now call “Easter” as a Christian holiday, so “Easter” must be a flawed or even doctrinally corrupt rendering of the underlying word.

However, the question is not what “Easter” means in today’s English, but what it meant in the English of the early translators. Historical study shows that “Easter” was at that time used to refer to the very time of year associated with the Jewish Passover. Later, translators such as Wycliffe and those following him introduced and normalized “Passover” as a distinct English term. The presence of “Easter” in Acts 12:4 does not prove that first-century believers observed a later Christian festival; it reflects older English usage for the Passover season.

A right approach is to research the term as used in 16th–17th century English, not to read back modern associations and then accuse the translators of teaching anachronistic festivals. Questioning the

rendering leads to historical clarification rather than to rejection of the translation.

Faith of Jesus and Faith in Jesus

In Romans 3:22 the KJV speaks of “the faith of Jesus Christ,” while in Romans 3:26 it reads “him which believeth in Jesus.” The underlying Greek construction in both places involves a genitive with “Jesus Christ.” Grammatically, there is debate among scholars whether such genitives are subjective (“the faith exercised by Christ”) or objective (“faith directed toward Christ”).

The KJV translators, like all translators, had to make interpretive decisions within the legitimate range of meaning. It is appropriate to ask whether “faith of Jesus” in one verse and “believeth in Jesus” in another best capture the nuance of each context. The fact that there is a genuine syntactical question does not indicate corruption; it indicates that language is not strictly one-to-one across Greek and English.

There is value in consulting the *Textus Receptus*, comparing parallel usages, and weighing whether a more consistent rendering would sharpen theological understanding. That kind of work is precisely what serious students should do.

Questioning Without Abandoning Confidence

The King James translation was an extraordinary scholarly effort, backed by significant resources and carried out by highly competent linguists. Its translators

themselves, in their prefaces and marginal notes, encouraged readers to recognize where interpretive judgments were made. They did not present their English wording as beyond all question.

For that reason:

- We should feel free to test KJV phrasings against the Textus Receptus and the Hebrew text.
- We should welcome questions about italics, lexical choices, and syntactical decisions.
- We should avoid assigning novel meanings to archaic spellings or orthography, as though different historical spellings necessarily indicate distinct words with distinct theologies.

Forbidding all questions about KJV wording does not protect the Bible; it undermines confidence in it among thoughtful readers. By contrast, patiently walking through the evidence, showing why the KJV translators rendered a phrase as they did, and where it most clearly reflects the underlying text, has actually led many serious students to adopt the KJV as their primary Bible.

To “question the assumptions” of a translation, including the KJV, is not heresy. It is the normal process of theological and textual inquiry. If the KJV faithfully reflects the preserved text, as I believe it does more consistently than modern versions, then honest scrutiny will tend to confirm its excellence rather than overthrow it.

10 Use of Modern Bible Versions in Teaching and Warning

Question

Man shall live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. After watching your last sermon, why are you still promoting modern corrupt versions instead of warning against them? Because you often say in other versions or Bibles it is rendered, but you know that these modern versions are all satanic luciferian counterfeits. If you want to compare or want to use other versions, why then using only the Textus Receptus Bible such as Geneva, the Bishop's, Great Bible, Tyndale, etc.?

September 15, 2026

Answer

The charge that I “promote” modern versions misunderstands what I am doing when I reference them. My settled position in preaching and teaching is to use the King James Version as my Bible. When I refer to other versions, it is almost always to demonstrate how they differ from the KJV and, more importantly, from the underlying traditional text.

To cite a rendering from the NASB, ESV, or another modern translation is not to commend it, but to expose where it departs from the text or obscures doctrinal nuance. One cannot intelligibly warn against something without identifying it, quoting it, and comparing it. Mentioning that “other versions render this phrase differently” is not an endorsement; it is a starting point for critique.

If one insists that even acknowledging an alternate rendering is tantamount to promoting it, then meaningful textual and translational analysis becomes impossible. Such a standard would also forbid mentioning pre-KJV English Bibles (Geneva, Bishops', Great Bible, Tyndale), because they, too, sometimes differ in wording. Logically, either all comparative work is prohibited, or careful comparison is permissible. It is inconsistent to allow comparison with older English versions drawn from the Textus Receptus while condemning any mention of modern translations as “promotion.”

The Role of Comparison

My own experience illustrates the value of comparison. I used to teach from the New American Standard Bible and was

largely unaware of KJV-only circles. It was precisely through studying Greek and comparing texts and translations that I came to see the superiority of the KJV and the underlying traditional text. That process required me to look directly at alternative renderings and to evaluate them.

I have seen many others make a similar journey. They were not persuaded by being told, “Do not ask questions; do not look at other versions.” They were persuaded when someone patiently showed them, passage by passage, how and where modern versions weaken doctrine, omit phrases, or flatten important distinctions. That kind of demonstration requires saying, “The NASB says this,” or “The ESV omits that phrase,” and then showing why it matters.

Warning While Teaching

Far from promoting modern versions, I regularly warn against them by highlighting textual and translational problems. When I say, “In other versions this is rendered such-and-such,” the very next move is typically to show why that rendering is inferior—textually, doctrinally, or linguistically. The aim is to strengthen confidence in the KJV and the preserved text, not to create appreciation for the alternatives.

To label all modern versions with charged terms and then forbid any direct citation of their wording does not help people see what is at stake. It simply tells them not to inquire. Many contemporary believers, however, have grown up on

these translations. They will not abandon them merely because someone denounces them in the abstract. They need to see the concrete differences.

Why Not Limit Comparison to Older TR-Based English Bibles?

The suggestion that, if one must compare, one should restrict oneself to TR-based English Bibles such as Geneva, Bishops’, the Great Bible, or Tyndale is selective. Those versions, while closer in text than modern critical versions, still contain differences of wording and sometimes of interpretation. If identifying differences in wording is inherently “promotional,” then mentioning Geneva or Tyndale is no more acceptable than mentioning the NASB.

If, on the other hand, one recognizes that comparison can be done without endorsement, then there is no principled reason to refuse to name modern translations when critiquing them. The issue is how they are used: are they cited as authorities to correct the KJV, or as exhibits to demonstrate the value of the KJV and the traditional text? My use is the latter.

In sum, I do not promote modern versions. I advocate the King James Version, use it exclusively in preaching and formal teaching, and warn about the deficiencies of modern translations. Referencing them explicitly is often the most effective way to equip people to see those deficiencies for themselves and to move them toward a more faithful Bible.

11 Repentance in Acts 2:38 and Its Relation to Life and Works

Question

I believe that Acts 2:38 refers to the repentance unto life in Acts 11:18, not repentance of sins for salvation, but a change of mind about the need for Christ that leads to salvation.

September 15, 2026

Answer

Your proposal is that in Acts 2:38 “repent” should be understood as a non-moral “change of mind” regarding the need for Christ, parallel to “repentance unto life” in Acts 11:18, rather than as repentance from sins in a behavioral sense. While this alleviates some theological tension for certain systems, it does not fully resolve the exegetical issues in Acts, and it may impose a definition not clearly derived from Luke’s usage.

The Immediate Context of Acts 2:38

Acts 2:38 reads:

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Even if one construes “repent” as “change your mind about Christ,” the verse

still includes a command: “be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” Grammatically, “for the remission of sins” most naturally attaches to the baptism clause, because:

- Baptism is explicitly said to be “in the name of Jesus Christ,” a formulation regularly used for baptism, not for an internal change of mind.
- The structure presents two imperatives (“repent, and be baptized”) followed by a shared purpose/result clause (“for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”).

Thus, redefining “repent” as a mere cognitive shift does not remove the association of remission of sins with baptism in this verse. The problem for a no-works soteriology in the early chapters of Acts does not disappear simply by adjusting the definition of repentance.

The Lexical Question of Repentance

Etymologically, the verb behind “repent” (*metanoēō*) combines elements for “after/again” and “mind/understanding,” suggesting a “change of mind.” However, words frequently develop usages beyond their bare etymology. The controlling factor is how a given author uses the term in context.

In the Gospels and Acts, repentance language regularly carries behavioral implications. Consider:

- Matthew 3:8: “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.” A mere internal opinion change does not produce “fruits” without corresponding behavioral change.
- Luke 11:32: “They repented at the preaching of Jonas.” The Ninevites’ repentance in Jonah is expressed in fasting, sackcloth, and turning from evil ways.
- Luke 13:3: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” The statement functions as a call to real turning, not merely mental adjustment.
- Acts 3:19: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” Here “repent” is coupled with “be converted” (turn), strongly suggesting more than an abstract change of opinion.

Luke’s pattern, then, links repentance to a turning that has moral and practical dimensions. Reducing it to a bare “change of mind about Christ” risks flattening this broader usage.

Acts 11:18 and Repentance Unto Life

Acts 11:18 states:

“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

This verse affirms that God has now granted to Gentiles a repentance that results in life. It does not explicitly define repentance as either purely cognitive or as including moral turning. It simply affirms that God is now granting to Gentiles the same kind of repentance that had previously been granted within Israel’s sphere.

There is no clear indication in the text that “repentance unto life” in Acts 11:18 is a categorically different type of repentance than the repentance demanded in earlier Jewish contexts (for example, John’s call, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”). To claim that in Acts 11 the word suddenly takes on a narrowly cognitive sense and that this definition must then be read back into Acts 2 is not something the narrative itself makes plain.

The Broader Problem of Works in the Early Acts Period

Even if we grant for argument’s sake that “repent” in Acts 2:38 could be understood as “change your mind about Christ,” the surrounding context of early Acts still contains elements that, on their face, condition blessing and forgiveness on actions:

- Baptism “for the remission of sins” in Acts 2:38.

- “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).
- Ongoing descriptions of community life involving obedience and perseverance in the apostolic teaching.

In addition, the Gospels that flow into Acts describe numerous kingdom conditions (obedience, fruit-bearing, willingness to forsake possessions) that are more than mental adjustment. Focusing exclusively on redefining repentance to resolve a perceived doctrinal tension can obscure these other elements.

A More Durable Approach

A more durable way to handle these texts is to recognize the dispensational distinction between the kingdom offer to Israel in the Gospels and early Acts, and the later revelation of the mystery given to Paul concerning the body of Christ and salvation by grace through faith apart from works of law.

Within the kingdom context, repentance, baptism, and conversion were

bound up with Israel’s national response to her Messiah and with participation in the promised earthly kingdom. Later Pauline revelation concerning justification by faith without works addresses a different administration and a different sphere.

Attempting to preserve a single, uniform definition of repentance across these differing settings and then forcing every occurrence into a modern systematic grid will tend to produce either strained redefinitions or contradictions. Allowing the historical and dispensational development to stand relieves that pressure.

In summary, while “change of mind” is part of the semantic range of repentance, Luke’s usage in Acts—especially in passages like Acts 2:38 and Acts 3:19—indicates more than a bare cognitive shift. Recasting repentance in Acts 2 as merely “change your mind about Christ” does not fully address the text’s connection of remission of sins with baptism and conversion, nor does it engage the broader works-related conditions evident in the kingdom proclamation to Israel.

12 The Present State of Moses After Death

Question

Where is Moses right now? I heard a pastor say he's in heaven, but I think he's in the grave awaiting the resurrection to the kingdom.

September 15, 2026

Answer

The question concerns the present state of Moses in light of Old Testament and New Testament data. There are some unique features in Moses' case, but the safest reading is that, like other Old Testament saints, he is in the state of the dead, awaiting resurrection for participation in the kingdom.

The Ordinary Pattern for Old Testament Saints

Before the present age of grace, those who died—whether faithful or unfaithful—are said to go to *Sheol*, translated “hell” in the KJV in many places. *Sheol* is the realm of the dead, not limited to the lost. Luke 16 presents a picture of a divided intermediate state: a place of comfort (often associated with “Abraham’s bosom”) and a place of torment, both within the general realm of the dead.

Old Testament believers, therefore, were not portrayed as immediately entering the heaven of God’s throne upon death, but as going to the unseen realm, awaiting resurrection. Their hope was

resurrection to life and participation in the earthly kingdom promised in the prophets.

Moses’ Death and Burial

Deuteronomy 34:5-6 states:

“So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.”

Moses is explicitly said to have died and been buried. There is no biblical account of his being taken bodily to heaven as with Enoch or Elijah. Enoch “was not; for God took him,” and Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind; both are exceptions to the normal pattern. Moses is not presented that way.

The Epistle of Jude alludes to a dispute over the body of Moses, but that very allusion presupposes the reality of his physical death and burial.

The Mount of Transfiguration

Moses does appear with Elijah at the transfiguration of Christ (see, for example, Matthew 17:1-3):

“And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.”

This shows that Moses, though dead, is conscious and able to appear in glory at Christ’s side. It does not, however, require that his normal place is heaven in the same sense as the glorified Christ. The appearance is a special manifestation granted for that event, just as Samuel’s appearance to Saul via the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28) was an exceptional event, not evidence that Samuel ordinarily roamed the earth.

Thus the transfiguration proves ongoing personal existence and capacity to appear, but it does not overturn the explicit testimony that Moses died and was buried.

Moses’ Present State

Given the pattern:

- Old Testament saints generally go to the realm of the dead (*Sheol*), in a condition of conscious waiting.
- Only Enoch and Elijah are explicitly portrayed as taken without seeing death.
- Moses is said to have died and been buried by the LORD, with his grave location unknown to men.

The most consistent conclusion is that Moses shares the ordinary lot of Old Testament faithful. He is in the state of the dead, in the place of comfort, awaiting resurrection to enter into the promised kingdom on earth. His appearance at the transfiguration is a divinely granted exception for revelatory purposes, not proof of an ongoing heavenly residence like that of the risen, ascended Christ.

When a pastor says, “Moses is in heaven,” he is likely using a generalized evangelical shorthand that does not distinguish between the various ages and revelations. From a dispensational and exegetical standpoint, it is more accurate to say that Moses is among the righteous dead, conscious and secure, awaiting his resurrection and place in the kingdom.

13 Critiquing a Calvinist Reinterpretation of Paul's Mystery

Question

Dr. White, for a long time, you have insisted that reformed theology overlooks the mystery and the revelation that God gave to Paul. I have now arrived at the conclusion to your confusion.

You say that Paul received a mystery. To that, I say I am fine with that. However, your definition of that mystery is wrong. Ezekiel 36:19 explains that God scattered the northern kingdom from among the heathen. Ezekiel 37:5 shows God resurrecting a people from dry bones. Romans 9:24 explains that God has now called both Jews and Gentiles: "Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles." The Jews are the literal remnant of Israel representing the southern kingdom. Paul's mystery was that God resurrected the northern kingdom through the calling of the Gentiles. Therefore, Hosea is not about God regathering the scattered Israelites, but the resurrection of spiritual Israel. This is the mystery. We are Israel.

Sincerely, Dave McPiper

September 16, 2026

Answer

Paul's claim to have received a "mystery" is not something any interpreter can dismiss or redefine at will. He repeatedly says that a mystery was given to him, that it was hidden in God, not known in other ages, and only then revealed. Any proposal about the nature of that mystery has to satisfy two basic tests: it must actually be a mystery (that is, previously unrevealed), and it must fit the explicit statements and contexts of Scripture.

Your proposal is that the mystery is this: God permanently rejected the north-

ern kingdom of Israel, scattered among the nations, and then resurrected that northern kingdom spiritually by calling the Gentiles; thus, the Gentiles are the resurrected northern kingdom, and "we are Israel." You appeal to Ezekiel 36–37, Hosea, and Romans 9. This sounds tidy, but it breaks down exegetically and theologically at several points.

1. A biblical mystery cannot be fully found in the Old Testament

Paul explicitly defines the mystery as something:

“which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men” Eph 3:5

and

“from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God” Eph 3:9

If you can construct your entire “mystery” by stringing together Ezekiel and Hosea, you have defined something that, by Paul’s own standard, is not a mystery. Reading Ezekiel 36–37, Hosea 1–2, and similar passages already tells you about Israel’s scattering and regathering. There is nothing hidden there about Gentiles becoming a resurrected northern kingdom. You have simply reinterpreted Israel as Gentiles and then called that reinterpretation a mystery.

A genuine Pauline mystery must be something that was not accessible by exegesis of the Hebrew prophets. It must be a new revelation, given to and explained by Paul, involving new ground rules for God’s dealings with humanity.

2. Ezekiel 36–37 promises real restoration of Israel, not replacement by Gentiles

You begin with Ezekiel 36:19:

“And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were

dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them.”

The context supports that this scattering concerns Israel in the land, including the northern kingdom.

But you stop short of the core promise. Continue in Ezekiel 36:

“For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.” Ezek 36:24–25

God is still speaking to the same scattered Israel. He promises to gather them out of all countries and bring them into *their own land*. There is no move in the text to shift these promises away from Israel to a non-Israelite Gentile entity. This is a national, territorial restoration of Israel for the sake of God’s name, not a spiritualization into the church.

Then Ezekiel 37:

“Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live.” Ezek 37:5

When Ezekiel asks what the dry bones represent, the answer is explicit: they are the whole house of Israel, including both Israel and Judah. The text interprets itself. For your definition of the mystery to stand, you must effectively override the divine

interpretation given in the chapter. You are taking a symbol God has already explained and assigning a different meaning: not national Israel, but Gentile believers as a spiritualized northern kingdom.

That is not sound exegesis; it is theological overlay.

3. Hosea foretells Israel's temporary rejection and future restoration, not replacement

You also appeal to Hosea, via Romans 9. In Hosea 1 God commands:

“Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.” Hos 1:9

But the very next verse overturns final rejection:

“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.” Hos 1:10

The “children of Israel” here are not Gentile nations; they are the same Israel that had been declared “not my people,” and they are said to be restored, in the *same place* where that judgment was pronounced. Hosea’s child Lo-ammi is a sign of temporary judgment on Israel, followed

by ultimate restoration. That pattern precisely matches the promises of Ezekiel 36–37. Temporary rejection, scattering, then gathering and cleansing.

When Paul cites Hosea in Romans 9:25–26, he demonstrates that God is free in his mercy—he can call those who are “not my people” to be his people. That illustrates God’s gracious principle and prefigures how he can also show mercy beyond Israel. But Paul does not say that this cancels God’s specific, national promises to Israel. In fact, in Romans 9–11 he labors to show that God’s faithfulness to Israel stands.

Your reading assumes that Hosea’s “not my people” becomes the basis for permanently rewriting Israel as a spiritual category fulfilled in Gentiles. That ignores the explicit “yet” in Hosea 1:10 and the clear restoration language.

4. Jesus’ earthly ministry contradicts the idea that Gentiles replaced the northern kingdom

In your scheme, the northern kingdom is permanently written off and Gentiles receive its promises, becoming the resurrected spiritual Israel. But Jesus’ own words and actions do not fit this.

He speaks of “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” Matt 15:24. He directs his disciples:

“Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Matt 10:6

This is precisely the scattered Israel you say has been utterly abandoned. Yet the

Messiah treats them as the target of his earthly ministry, not as a closed chapter whose promises are being handed over to Gentiles.

Consider his interaction with the Syro-Phoenician (Canaanite) woman. He says:

“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. . . . It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.” Matt 15:24, 26

He explicitly distinguishes Israel (“the children”) from the Gentiles (“dogs”) and says his mission is to Israel. If the true mystery were that Gentiles *are* the resurrected northern kingdom, then Jesus’ statements here would be profoundly misleading. He treats Israel and Gentiles as distinct categories and affirms covenant priority for Israel.

Christ does not speak as though Gentiles are already or soon to become the northern kingdom. He speaks as though Israel’s promises remain with Israel.

5. Paul’s actual mystery concerns a new, non-covenantal body, not a reshuffled Israel

When Paul explains the mystery in places like Ephesians and Colossians, he does not describe it as the northern kingdom resurfacing in Gentiles. Rather, he speaks of a new entity, the body of Christ, in which Jew and Gentile are united on equal footing apart from Israel’s covenants and law.

For example:

“That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” Eph 3:6

The mystery is not that Gentiles replace Israel or absorb the northern tribes. It is that Gentiles, as Gentiles, can be joint-heirs in a *new* body, where the distinction of covenantal status is set aside in Christ. This was not revealed in the prophets, because the prophets consistently anticipate Israel’s national restoration and the nations being blessed through that restoration, not merged into Israel or made Israel.

The prophets foresee saved nations *alongside* a restored Israel; Paul reveals a trans-national body in which those distinctions do not define standing before God. That is genuinely new and genuinely mysterious, unlike your construction which simply reassigns Israel’s name to a different group.

6. Two fundamental failures in the proposed “mystery”

Your proposal fails on two key counts:

6.1. The mystery is not new

You claim to derive the mystery from Ezekiel and Hosea. But again, a mystery “hid in God” and “not made known in other ages” cannot be exegeted directly from the prophets. If your mystery can be systematized from the Old Testament text, it is by definition not Paul’s mystery.

6.2. The proposal disregards large sections of the very texts it uses

To sustain your view, you have to:

- Ignore or spiritualize Ezekiel 36:24–28, where God promises to bring the same scattered Israel back into their own land and cleanse them.
- Ignore the explicit identification of the dry bones as the whole house of Israel and Judah in Ezekiel 37.
- Override Hosea 1:10, where the same “not my people” Israel is later said to be “sons of the living God” in the same place.
- Flatten Paul’s use of Hosea in Romans 9 into a replacement of Israel, even as Romans 11 affirms Israel’s future restoration.

In doing so, you end up with a system that casts Israel aside and recasts God’s faithfulness as canceling one people in order to prioritize another. Ironically, that is the very sort of error that arises when the real Pauline mystery of the body of Christ is not understood. The mystery becomes centered on “us” instead of on what God has actually revealed.

Your zeal for a coherent system is understandable, but it must be governed by the whole counsel of Scripture and by Paul’s own definition of the mystery. When those standards are applied, the suggested “mystery” that Gentiles are the resurrected northern kingdom cannot stand.



14 Identifying the Boundaries of Biblical Dispensations

Question

How do you know when a new dispensation begins?

September 16, 2026

Answer

Scripture commands us to “rightly divid[e] the word of truth” 2 Tim 2:15. That implies that certain portions of revelation belong to distinct arrangements—what we commonly call dispensations. The challenge is that the Bible does not provide a labeled chart of these divisions. We must discern them by close, normal reading of the text.

The basic principle is this: a new dispensation begins when God introduces revelation or fulfills prophecy in a way that fundamentally changes how mankind as a whole is to relate to him. Not every fulfilled prophecy or historical event qualifies; the question is whether the “ground rules” of relationship to God are altered.

1. Read the Bible normally and watch for fundamental changes

The process begins with a straightforward reading of Scripture. Take terms in their ordinary sense: “Israel” means Israel, “nations” means nations, “light” means light unless the text clearly signals metaphor. Do not begin with a system; begin with the narrative and instructions as they stand.

As you read, ask:

- Is there new revelation that could not have been known before?
- Does this revelation, or its fulfillment, require a new way of approaching God?
- Does this change apply broadly to mankind, rather than being a merely local or private circumstance?

When the answer to these questions is yes, you are likely at the boundary of a dispensation.

2. Early examples: Eden and the fall

In Genesis 2, humanity lives in the garden, with direct fellowship with God, under a simple prohibition: do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After the serpent’s deception and the fall in Genesis 3, the text portrays a decisive shift:

- They suddenly know they are naked and feel shame.
- They hide from God, something they had not done before.
- God pronounces curses on the serpent, the woman, and the man, and expels them from the garden.

Nothing in the passage explicitly says, “here begins a new dispensation,” yet it is evident that the mode of life and relationship to God has radically changed. This is precisely the kind of event that marks a dispensational boundary.

3. Distinguishing major from minor changes

After the flood, God permits the eating of meat Gen 9:3. That is a real change in human life, but it is debatable whether it fundamentally alters the God–man relationship in the way the fall did. You must evaluate whether a change is primarily social or dietary, or whether it redefines how God is known and approached.

Similarly, God's call of Abram in Genesis 12 is subtle but profound. God moves from dealing directly with all humanity as a whole to focusing on one man and his seed. From that point, if someone wants to relate rightly to God, he must, so to speak, come "through Abraham." This is not announced with fanfare, but careful reading shows that the center of God's dealings shifts from universal to Abrahamic. Many dispensational frameworks recognize this as the beginning of a distinct economy.

4. The giving of the law: a clear dispensational marker

The next unmistakable shift is the giving of the Mosaic law in Exodus 20. Here, God establishes a full covenant code with Israel. From this point forward, right relationship with God for Israel is defined in covenantal and legal terms: sacrifices, Sabbaths, festivals, purity laws, and so on. People who want to approach God must do so in accord with that revealed law, tied to Israel's covenants.

This law-based arrangement continues throughout the Old Testament and into the Gospels. It is still the operational framework during Jesus' earthly ministry: he and his disciples attend the feasts, go to the temple, keep the Sabbaths, and live within the Mosaic order before and after the crucifixion.

5. The Pauline revelation: a major shift from law to grace

The most dramatic post-Sinai change comes with the revelation given to Paul.

He insists that he received a direct revelation about a new message and stewardship. Among other things, he declares:

"Ye are not under the law, but under grace." Rom 6:14

This is not a mere nuance; it is a new basis of standing before God, apart from the Mosaic code and Israel's covenants. Gentiles can now be saved and stand complete in Christ without coming under the law or into Israel's covenantal structure.

Notably, the apostles in the early chapters of Acts continue temple worship and sacrifices, signaling that the old arrangement did not end simply at the cross or the resurrection. The clear "break" in how God instructs believers to relate to him is tied to Paul's distinctive commission and teaching, not merely to the historical moment of Calvary.

6. Future dispensational changes

Scripture also foresees future periods in which the "rules of the game" will again change: the tribulation period and the millennial reign of Christ. In both, God's dealings with Israel and the nations are structured differently than in the present age. These are grounded in prophecy but involve conditions and requirements distinct from the current grace economy Paul describes.

7. A practical method for identifying dispensations

Putting this together, a workable method is:

1. Read the flow of Scripture in its normal sense.
2. Remember the command to “rightly divide” and watch for large-scale shifts.
3. Mark places where:
 - New revelation about God’s dealings with mankind is introduced, and
 - That revelation entails a new, normative way to approach and be approved by God.
4. Distinguish between changes in lifestyle or circumstance and changes in covenantal standing and means of access to God.

Working in this way—as an investigator or auditor of the text—you will see major turning points such as:

- The fall.
- The call of Abraham.
- The giving of the Mosaic law.
- The Pauline revelation of grace apart from the law.
- The prophesied tribulation and millennial kingdom.

These are not arbitrary divisions invented to support a theological system; they arise from the text itself when read carefully with the mandate to divide the word rightly.



15 Clarifying the Biblical Meaning of Idolatry

Question

What is the biblical definition of idolatry or of an idol? In my former evangelical church, I often heard that anything could become an idol. Is that what Scripture teaches?

September 16, 2026

Answer

The way the word “idol” is typically used in evangelical circles—“anything you love too much is an idol”—does not match the primary biblical usage. Scripture certainly warns about misplaced priorities, love of the world, and similar dangers, but it uses the language of idolatry more narrowly and concretely.

1. Core Old Testament definitions

In the Ten Commandments, we read:

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.”
Exod 20:3–5

Here, idolatry is associated with:

- Other “gods” set before the true God.
- Making a graven image or likeness.
- Bowing down to and serving that image.

Romans 1 develops this further:

“They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and

fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.” Rom 1:23

This is worship of the creature rather than the Creator, expressed through images and cultic devotion.

So biblically, an idol is not simply any valued object or pursuit. It is an object, figure, or concept that is honored as a god, with religious devotion, in place of or alongside the true God.

2. New Testament usage: idols and false gods

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul says:

“As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) but to us there is but one God.” 1 Cor 8:4–6

Here, an idol is a supposed god represented by a cultic object. Food offered in sacrifice to idols is part of a false religious system. The issue is not simply affection or time investment; it is participation in, or association with, worship directed to a false deity.

In Philipians 3:19 Paul says:

“Whose end is destruction,
whose God is their belly, and
whose glory is in their shame,
who mind earthly things.”

This is a metaphorical extension: their “god”—the object of ultimate service and expectation—is their appetite. Even here, the idea is not merely that they enjoy food but that their driving allegiance is to fleshly desire instead of to God.

3. Worshipful devotion versus ordinary enjoyment

The key distinction is between:

- Ordinary enjoyment or high valuation of something (work, family, possessions, hobbies), and
- Worshipful devotion: looking to something as a source of spiritual or ultimate blessing, giving it the kind of honor and trust that belongs to God.

A person may polish his car daily, invest large sums in it, and derive great enjoyment from it. That may indicate questionable priorities, but unless he attributes to it spiritual power, places his ultimate hope in it, or treats it as an object of religious veneration, it does not fit the biblical pattern of idolatry. It may be an unwise attachment; it is not necessarily an idol in the scriptural sense.

Scripture certainly addresses misplaced priorities and love of the world, but that is not identical to bowing before an image, offering sacrifices, or ascribing divine honors to something created.

4. The problem with expanding “idolatry” to mean any strong interest

When “idol” is used as shorthand for any strong affection, several problems arise:

- It blurs important biblical categories. Warnings about worldly priorities, covetousness, or lack of self-control are different from warnings about worshiping false gods.
- It creates an undefined accusation. If anything can be an idol, then the preacher or counselor becomes the arbiter of what counts as “too much,” without clear biblical parameters.
- It dilutes the seriousness of true idolatry. The biblical condemnation of bowing to images, invoking other gods, and participating in false worship becomes just another way of saying “you watch too much TV.”

Using the language of idolatry to speak about every sort of imbalance in life adds rhetorical punch, but it does so at the cost of precision.

5. A biblically grounded definition

Putting this together, a biblically responsible definition would be:

Idolatry is giving to any created thing, person, or concept the worship, trust, or religious devotion that belongs to the one true God, often expressed in images, rituals, and cultic service, and looking to it for spiritual or ultimate benefit.

A believer may have disordered priorities, may overwork, or may indulge in too much entertainment. Those are moral and spiritual issues, and Scripture addresses them with appropriate categories. But to call every such excess “idolatry” stretches the biblical term beyond its intended scope.

The exhortations to “flee from idolatry” 1 Cor 10:14 are, in context, about avoiding participation in false worship and its associated rites. They are doctrinal and

cultic warnings, not general rebukes for enjoying legitimate created things in moderation.

If a pastor wants to preach on priorities, he has ample biblical material—without needing to redefine idolatry to cover every misuse of time or affection. Keeping the biblical definition clear helps preserve the force of the warnings against true idol worship while allowing us to address other sins with the categories Scripture itself employs.



16 Reconciling the Father’s Voice in the Gospels and John 5

Question

I understand the voice from heaven in Luke 3:22 and John 12:28 to be the Father’s. How does that fit with John 5:37 where Jesus says his hearers had not heard the Father’s voice? Whose voice came from heaven?

September 16, 2026

Answer

Luke 3:22 records a voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism:

“Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.”

John 12:28 likewise reports:

“Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

These are naturally and traditionally understood as the Father's voice.

In John 5:37, however, Jesus says:

"Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape."

The question is how these statements fit together. The resolution lies in paying close attention to the pronoun "ye" and to the audiences involved.

1. Identifying the audiences

In John 5, beginning around verse 16, the context is:

"And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day." John 5:16

They are angered by his Sabbath healing and by his claim that God is his Father, making himself equal with God. These are hostile, unbelieving Jews in Galilee.

To this specific group Jesus says:

"And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not." John 5:37–38

The "ye" here is this particular group of opponents, characterized by unbelief and lack of God's word abiding in them.

Jesus is not making a blanket statement about all Israelites or all humans; he is addressing a concrete audience in front of him.

By contrast:

- At the baptism (Luke 3), the audience consists of those coming to John at the Jordan, in Judea, to hear his preaching and receive his baptism—a group inclined at least to heed John's call to repentance.
- In John 12:28, the setting is Jerusalem at the feast; the bystanders include people who hear the voice, though some misinterpret it as thunder or an angelic sound.

There is no textual indication that the hostile group in John 5:37 was present at either the baptism in Luke 3 or the Jerusalem event in John 12. The simplest reading is that many had not been at those earlier events and, as a group, had not personally received the Father's direct testimony.

2. The force of "ye have neither heard his voice"

Given that the Old Testament records instances of God speaking and that certain New Testament figures (such as those at the baptism and at the transfiguration) did hear a heavenly voice, John 5:37 cannot reasonably be taken as an absolute denial that *no one* has ever heard God's voice. Rather, the statement is narrowed by the pronoun: "ye"—you people standing here in opposition to me—have not heard his voice.

The verse that follows confirms this focus:

“And ye have not his word
abiding in you: for whom he
hath sent, him ye believe not.”
John 5:38

Their lack of hearing and their lack of the word abiding in them are linked to their unbelief in the Son. The issue is their spiritual and experiential distance from the Father’s witness, not a denial that the Father has ever spoken audibly to anyone.

3. Other instances of the Father’s voice

The transfiguration provides another clear occasion of the Father’s voice:

“While he yet spake, behold,
a bright cloud overshadowed
them: and behold a voice out
of the cloud, which said, This
is my beloved Son, in whom
I am well pleased; hear ye
him.” Matt 17:5

This event likely took place in the north (often associated with Galilee or its vicinity), yet the audience was extremely limited: Peter, James, and John. Even if this is geographically near, temporally it occurs later than the discourse of John 5, and in any case it does not involve the hostile group Jesus addresses in John 5.

Taken together, these passages show that:

- The Father has, on certain occasions, spoken audibly from heaven, bearing witness to the Son.
- Only certain select groups or individuals were present on those occasions.
- The unbelieving audience of John 5:37 had, as a group, not heard that voice or received it in faith.

4. Whose voice came from heaven?

On the basis of Luke 3:22, John 12:28, and Matthew 17:5, the voice from heaven is the Father’s. John 5:37 does not contradict this; it simply states that the particular opponents Jesus is addressing have not, at any time, heard that voice or seen his form. The apparent tension disappears when “ye” is read with its immediate, local reference rather than as a universal statement about all human experience.

Thus, the Father has indeed spoken audibly from heaven in witness to his Son, but the group rebuked in John 5 had neither heard nor received that witness. The passages are harmonious when the pronouns and contexts are carefully observed.

17 The Identity of the Original Human Language

Question

Genesis 11 verse 1 says the whole earth had one language. Do we know what it was? Since the earliest written records are Sumerian, does that suggest that the language was Sumerian?

September 17, 2026

Answer

Scripture affirms in Genesis 11:1 that “the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.” However, the text does not identify that language by name. Any answer beyond that is necessarily inferential and somewhat speculative.

One proposal is that the original language might be connected to Sumerian, since some of the earliest written records we possess are in Sumerian. Another is that it was some form of proto-Hebrew, sometimes called “Adamic,” on the basis of certain wordplays that work in Hebrew.

We should distinguish between (1) what the Bible explicitly states, (2) what it reasonably allows, and (3) what goes beyond the text.

Speech Before Writing

Genesis 11 speaks of “one language” and “one speech,” not of a writing system. In human societies, speech virtually always precedes writing. So the fact that Sumerian is among the earliest known written languages does not prove that the one original spoken language was Sumerian.

Writing simply leaves physical evidence; prior speech does not.

Sumerian today is a dead language, but it shows relationships to the broader ancient Near Eastern language environment. That makes it historically significant, but not decisive for identifying the Babel language.

The Adamic Language and Hebrew Wordplay

Some argue that the original language must have been Hebrew (or proto-Hebrew) because of linguistic features that “work” in Hebrew. For example, in Genesis 2:23:

“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

In Hebrew, this reads: she shall be called *ishah* because she was taken out of *ish*. The wordplay between *ish* (man) and *ishah* (woman) works neatly in Hebrew, and commentators such as Rashi

have taken this as evidence that Hebrew was the original language.

That argument, however, assumes that the actual original *sounds* of Adam's words are preserved. It is possible that what Scripture preserves is the meaning, accurately rendered into Hebrew, rather than the exact ancient phonetics. If that is the case, the Hebrew wordplay may reflect a faithful translation rather than the primitive language itself.

One could also posit that Adam spoke an "Adamic" language, from which the Babel language descended. That language could have been preserved, in essence, until the dispersion of Genesis 11. This is conceivable, though it cannot be demonstrated.

Proto-Language Concepts

Linguists often use the prefix "proto-" to indicate an earlier, reconstructed form of a language family (e.g., Proto-Indo-European). In a similar way, one might speak of a proto-Hebrew or proto-Semitic language that lay behind later Hebrew, Aramaic, and related tongues.

This allows for the idea that:

- There was a single real human language in use from Adam through Babel.
- That language stood at the head of later Semitic languages, including Hebrew.
- Hebrew as we know it is related to that original tongue but has changed over time.

Even within Hebrew itself we can see development. Modern Hebrew has many loanwords (for example, the modern word

for "shampoo"), which obviously were not part of the language at creation or in the patriarchal age.

The Limits of What We Can Say

Given the biblical data, the most we can say with confidence is:

1. Humanity did indeed have one language and one speech prior to Babel (Genesis 11:1).
2. That language continued from Adam to the events of Babel.
3. At Babel, God "confounded the language of all the earth" and scattered mankind (Genesis 11:7-9).

It is reasonable to think that the later Semitic languages (including Hebrew) retain features of that original tongue. The wordplay in Genesis 2:23 fits well in Hebrew and may suggest a close relationship between Hebrew and the earliest human speech. But it does not prove that the original language was technically the same as biblical Hebrew as we know it.

We cannot securely identify the one language as Sumerian simply because Sumerian is early in written form. The Bible does not tie Sumerian to Babel, and the chronology of surviving inscriptions is not enough to settle the matter.

So, while Hebrew (or a proto-Hebrew) is probably the best theological candidate, Scripture does not definitively name the language. We should therefore hold any specific identification with humility and recognize the boundaries of what God has revealed.

18 Repentance and the Mosaic Law in the New Testament

Question

Why do theologians not see it was repentance from breaking the Mosaic law? Now, we're talking about repentance in the New Testament.

September 17, 2026

Answer

In many New Testament contexts, repentance is best understood in relation to Israel's covenant under the Mosaic law, rather than as a generic moral reform or a mere change of opinion. Modern theology often detaches repentance from that covenant setting, which leads to confusion and to private redefinitions of the word.

The Greek term commonly translated "repent" points etymologically to a change of mind. Yet, in actual usage, the word carries the sense of turning from a course of action to another course, especially in a covenantal relationship. Language is defined by usage, not merely by its etymological parts.

Repentance in Israel's Covenant Framework

Israel's life with God was regulated by the Mosaic covenant. Blessings and curses were explicitly tied to obedience and disobedience. When Israel strayed from the law, the call to "return" was a call to come back into faithful covenant observance.

Deuteronomy 30:1–3 gives a paradigmatic picture:

"And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee."

Here, the movement is clear:

- Israel experiences the curse for covenant disobedience.
- They “call to mind” the blessings and curses.
- They “return unto the Lord” and obey what He commanded “this day” (the law).
- Then God reverses their captivity and restores them.

Although the word “repent” is not used here in English, this passage describes exactly what repentance is for Israel: a return to the law’s covenant terms.

New Testament Calls to Repentance

When John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, and Peter call Israel to repent, they are speaking within this Deuteronomic framework.

For example, Peter in Acts 2:38 says:

“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . .”

His audience is “all the house of Israel” (Acts 2:36). Their sins include rejecting and crucifying their Messiah, which is itself a violation of the covenant. To repent here is to turn back from their breach, acknowledge their sin against the Holy One, and come into covenant faithfulness as defined under the law and its prophetic fulfillment in the Messiah.

Likewise, in Acts 3:13–15, Peter indicts them:

“The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the

God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life . . .”

This behavior is utterly contrary to the standards of the law, even when not quoting a specific verse. When Peter then calls them to repent, it is a call to return to the blessings and curses and to align with God’s covenant purposes for Israel through the Messiah.

Thus, unless a context clearly specifies otherwise, repentance in the Gospels and Acts is best read as a call for Israel to turn from breaking the Mosaic law and its covenant responsibilities, and to return to the God of that covenant in obedient faith.

Why Many Theologians Miss the Mosaic Focus

Several factors contribute to theologians overlooking this covenantal dimension:

1. **Theological systems that flatten Scripture.** Covenant theology and much of evangelical theology often merge Israel and the church into one people of God and blur the distinction between the kingdom program for Israel and the Pauline revelation of the body of Christ. In such a system, Israel’s specific covenant

context is minimized, and “repentance” gets generalized.

2. Private redefinitions of “repent.”

Some teachers, concerned to protect “grace alone” from perceived threats, insist that repentance must never mean a behavioral turning, only an internal change of mind. This creates a private theological dictionary that does not match the way the word is actually used in Scripture or in ordinary language.

3. Fear of adding works to the gospel.

There is a legitimate concern not to add works to justification by grace through faith. But the solution is to rightly divide Israel’s kingdom message from Paul’s gospel, not to redefine vocabulary. When we try to force Acts 2 or 3 into Paul’s gospel of pure grace, we are compelled either to add works or to twist words.

Repentance and the Pauline Gospel

In the gospel of the grace of God revealed to Paul, justification is by faith without works of the law. Crucially, in Paul’s clear salvation texts for this age, repentance is not made a condition for obtaining eternal life in the way it is preached in the kingdom context.

Paul proclaims faith in the crucified and risen Christ as the sole condition for justification, apart from works. When he addresses repentance, it is often in the realm of believers’ conduct and correction, or in relation to Israel as a nation,

rather than as an added requirement for the individual Gentile believer’s justification.

Therefore, we do not need to redefine repentance to protect grace. We need to recognize that the New Testament uses the word in covenantal, kingdom-oriented contexts primarily relating to Israel, and that Paul’s distinct revelation handles justification on a different basis.

Objective Meaning Versus Private Dictionaries

Words must be taken according to their objective usage. If, in common usage and in Scripture, “repent” means to turn from a course of behavior to another, we cannot simply insist that in theological discourse it only means “change your mind” in a purely internal, non-behavioral sense.

Language changes over time. For instance, older literature may describe people as having a “gay” time, meaning cheerful. Today, that word carries a very different primary meaning. We do not get to impose an older sense when current usage and context clearly indicate another.

Similarly, in Scripture and in theological parlance, “repent” has come to mean a turning from sin or error toward God and obedience. The context of Israel under the Mosaic law shapes that meaning in the Gospels and Acts. To deny that covenantal and behavioral dimension is to create a private theological lexicon that soon collapses under the text’s own usage.

The better way is:

- Acknowledge that New Testament calls to repentance, especially before and in early Acts, are calls

for Israel to turn from covenant-breaking and return to Mosaic faithfulness centered in their Messiah.

- Recognize that this kingdom call is not the same as the Pauline offer of justification to Jew and Gentile alike by grace through faith apart from law works.

When we keep Israel's law covenant in view and rightly divide the times and audiences, it becomes clear that repentance in those New Testament passages is indeed bound up with breaking the Mosaic law, and that much modern theology misses this because it does not preserve those biblical distinctions.



19 The Olive Tree in Romans 11 and Gentile Inclusion

Question

As a mid Acts right divider, I have understood the olive tree in Romans 11 as God's eternal purpose, not Israel or the Messiah. Are the grafted in Gentiles the body of Christ or proselytes to the kingdom program? How does their possible cutting off in verse 22 fit, especially in light of Ephesians chapter 3 verse 6?

September 17, 2026

Answer

Seeing the olive tree of Romans 11 as representing God's eternal purpose, rather than Israel or the Messiah Himself, is a sound approach and avoids several theological difficulties. The "tree" is the plan and purpose of God into which different groups may be related in different ways at different times.

If we misidentify the tree, we are forced into either making the body of

Christ subject to being cut off or into blending Israel and the church in ways that contradict the clarity of Paul's mystery revelation in Ephesians.

Identifying the Olive Tree

Many reformed and covenant theologians say the tree is Israel, or the Messiah as the embodiment of Israel. From this they argue that Gentiles are grafted into Is-

rael and become part of Israel's covenant people. This reading lies behind translations like the NIV in Ephesians 3:6, which speak of Gentiles being "heirs together with Israel."

However, if the tree is Israel or the Messiah, serious problems arise in Romans 11:22, where Paul warns Gentiles:

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."

If the Gentiles here are the body of Christ grafted into Israel or into the Messiah, then the body of Christ can be cut off. That would contradict the secure position of believers in Christ as taught elsewhere by Paul.

A more coherent view is that the tree symbolizes the outworking of God's purpose in history: His plan to work in and through certain people to accomplish His ends. Israel, as a nation, was historically the primary participant in that purpose. When Israel fell in unbelief, branches were broken off; Gentiles were grafted in as participants in that ongoing purpose.

Grafted Gentiles and the Body of Christ

We must distinguish:

- Being *grafted into the olive tree* (participation in God's historical purpose and favor), and

- Being *baptized into the body of Christ* (the new man of Ephesians 2–3).

Scripture speaks of believers being baptized by the Spirit into one body. It does not speak of us being grafted into the body of Christ. Grafting imagery is used with the olive tree in Romans 11, which is about Israel and Gentiles in relation to God's dealings in history, not primarily about individual forensic justification in the present dispensation.

Thus, the "grafted in" Gentiles of Romans 11 are not necessarily equivalent, one-to-one, with members of the body of Christ. Rather, they represent the Gentile position in this era of salvation-historical opportunity. Gentiles now stand in a place of favor where God is actively offering salvation to them and using them within His purpose, in contrast to former times when they were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" (Ephesians 2:12).

Romans 11:22 and the Warning of Being Cut Off

If we take the olive tree as God's purpose and the grafted Gentiles as representing Gentiles in general in this age, Romans 11:22 becomes a warning about a corporate position rather than about individual loss of salvation.

Gentiles as a group now experience the "goodness" of God in being included in His active dealings. If they do not continue in that goodness, if they follow the path of pride and unbelief, God can and

will cut them off from that favored position, just as He did with Israel historically.

This reading avoids:

- Asserting that individual members of the body of Christ lose salvation.
- Making the body of Christ subject to the same kind of national-cutting-off discipline that was applied to Israel under the kingdom program.
- Forcing “works to remain grafted in” into the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Instead, it keeps Romans 11 focused on dispensational arrangements: which group (Israel or Gentiles) is in the foreground of God’s dealings at a given historical moment.

Ephesians 3:6 and Translation Issues

Ephesians 3:6 in the King James Version reads:

“That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”

Here, Paul reveals a mystery: that Gentiles *should be* fellowheirs and of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ *by the gospel*. This body is a new entity, created in Christ, where the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile has been broken down.

Modern translations sometimes insert interpretive phrases. The NIV, for example, renders:

“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are

heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

The phrase “heirs together with Israel” is not a literal rendering but an interpretive expansion. It presupposes that the body into which Gentiles come is Israel itself, and that the promises are Israel’s covenant promises, simply extended to Gentiles. This fits covenant theology’s insistence that the church is the continuation of Israel.

The King James wording better preserves Paul’s radical claim: that a *new* body, unknown in former ages, has been revealed, composed of both Jews and Gentiles who are now fellowheirs in something not previously disclosed.

When we keep this newness in view, Romans 11 must not be read as if the olive tree is identical with that new body. Instead, the olive tree is God’s broader purpose, into which different entities (Israel under the covenants, Gentiles under this new administration) are variously related.

Consistency and the Danger of Compatibility Doctrines

Covenant theology routinely appeals to the idea that apparent contradictions are “mysteries” that we must accept even if they do not logically cohere. This kind of compatibility doctrine allows one to say that believers are both secure in Christ and yet can be “cut off” from the very reality into which they were supposedly grafted.

A dispensational, right-dividing approach insists that Scripture's teaching should be logically consistent because God is not the author of confusion. If a certain interpretation of Romans 11 forces us to imagine the body of Christ being severed from Christ, we must reconsider our interpretation of the olive tree, not adjust the doctrine of security.

By taking the tree as God's purpose, the branches as historical participants (first Israel, then Gentiles), and the cutting off as a corporate historical judgment, we maintain:

- The integrity of Paul's mystery revelation.
- The security of those in the body of Christ.
- The seriousness of God's dealings with groups across dispensational lines.

Summary of the Relationships

- The **olive tree** represents God's ongoing purpose and favor in history.

- **Israel** as a nation was originally in that place of privilege; unbelief led to branches being broken off.
- **Gentiles** have now been grafted into that sphere of privilege and are warned corporately against pride and unbelief, lest they too be cut off.
- The **body of Christ** is a new entity revealed in the mystery, formed by Spirit baptism, not by grafting into Israel or into the Messiah as Israel's head.
- **Ephesians 3:6** teaches that Gentiles are fellowheirs and of the same body in this new creation, not that they become Israel or are folded into Israel's covenants.

Understood this way, Romans 11 fits harmoniously with Ephesians 3 and with mid Acts right division. The grafted-in Gentiles are not proselytes to Israel's kingdom program, nor are they the body of Christ being grafted into Israel. They are Gentiles now placed within God's active saving purpose, in a position that could, on the corporate level, be relinquished in judgment if unbelief prevails—just as it did with Israel.

20 Natural Disasters and the Curse on Creation

Question

Is it true that the world is full of natural disasters because of the curse on the ground in Genesis 3:17?

September 17, 2026

Answer

Genesis 3:17 records God's word to Adam:

"Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life."

This certainly introduces a curse on the creation, but the specific outworking of that curse and its relation to what we call natural disasters requires careful consideration.

The Immediate Focus of the Curse

In its immediate context, the curse on the ground emphasizes:

"Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till

thou return unto the ground" (Genesis 3:18–19).

The emphasis is on difficulty in agriculture, frustration in man's labor, and eventual physical death. The ground will resist man's efforts; it will produce what is unhelpful (thorns and thistles) and require toil.

By itself, this passage does not directly mention earthquakes, hurricanes, or floods. One could say that thorns and thistles, as bad as they are, are not of the same magnitude as a devastating earthquake. So while the curse clearly affects the earth, Genesis 3 alone may not explain all later natural catastrophes.

Creation's Groaning in Romans 8

The New Testament expands our view of the creation's condition. Paul writes in Romans 8:20–22:

"For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same

in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”

Here, the “creature” or creation is said to be:

- Subject to vanity.
- In bondage to corruption.
- Groaning and travailing in pain.

This language suggests more than agricultural frustration; it describes a comprehensive subjection of the created order to decay and disorder, awaiting future deliverance. The curse in Genesis 3 appears to be the beginning of that state, but the full picture includes an ongoing, deepening corruption of the entire created order.

The Flood and Subsequent Conditions

Scripture also records a global judgment in the days of Noah. The breaking up of the “fountains of the great deep” and the opening of the “windows of heaven” (Genesis 7:11) indicate a profound disruption of earth’s systems.

While Scripture does not give a meteorological manual, it is reasonable to understand that the flood fundamentally altered the earth’s surface and climate. Many have suggested that phenomena we now classify as “natural disasters”—violent storms, large-scale flooding patterns, tectonic instability—were intensified or even

initiated by the post-flood configuration of the earth.

The biblical narrative:

- Introduces the curse on the ground in Genesis 3.
- Later records a cataclysmic global judgment in Genesis 6–9.

Together, these events account for a world that both resists man’s efforts and periodically afflicts him with severe calamities.

Natural Disasters as Part of a Groaning Creation

We see throughout Scripture instances of what we would call natural disasters:

- A “great wind from the wilderness” collapsing a house upon Job’s children (Job 1:18–19).
- Earthquakes and other earth-shaking events in prophetic and apocalyptic contexts.

These fit the description of creation “groaning and travailing in pain.” They are marks of a world not as it was originally created, but as it now is under the bondage of corruption.

It is plausible to think in terms of a progression:

1. *The curse in Eden* introduces decay, resistance, and mortality into creation.
2. *The flood* drastically restructures the earth, likely intensifying or inaugurating many of the large-scale destructive phenomena we see.

3. *Ongoing decay* under the second law of thermodynamics corresponds to the biblical picture of a creation moving further from its original order and stability.

Thus, natural disasters are part of the broader condition of a cursed and groaning creation, rooted in the fall and further shaped by subsequent judgments.

Avoiding Misapplications

Two errors must be avoided:

- **Attributing every disaster to specific local sin.** In Luke 13, Jesus warned against assuming that victims of calamity were worse sinners than others simply because they suffered disaster. Not every earthquake or hurricane is a targeted punishment upon particular individuals.
- **Denying the moral-spiritual backdrop altogether.** On the other hand,

we should not speak as if the creation were morally neutral and its disorders had no connection to sin. Scripture clearly ties the present condition of the world to human rebellion and divine judgment.

Natural disasters are thus best understood as manifestations of a creation subjected to vanity and corruption because of Adam's sin, working themselves out over time in a fallen cosmos. Genesis 3:17 is the starting point; Romans 8 describes the ongoing condition; the flood and later judgments further mark and aggravate that condition.

So, it is broadly true to say that the world is full of natural disasters *because* of the curse, but the full biblical picture includes not only the initial curse on the ground but also the groaning of the whole creation and the historical upheavals that have shaped the present earth.

21 Liturgy, Ritual, and Church Identity

Question

Our church's ministers have begun introducing liturgy such as responsive readings into worship. Though I know scripture endorses orderly corporate worship, this feels too ritualistic for our independent Christian church. What's your take on using liturgy in church worship?

September 17, 2026

Answer

Scripture does call for order in corporate worship. Paul instructs that all things be done “decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40) and gives directives about orderly participation. So planning, structure, and even set forms of prayer or reading are not, in themselves, unbiblical.

The question concerns the kind and degree of structure, and how adopting certain forms affects a congregation's identity and theological trajectory.

What Liturgy Is and Is Not

The term “liturgy” comes from a Greek word meaning service, especially in a religious context. In common usage, it refers to an ordered pattern of worship that includes prescribed prayers, readings, responses, and actions.

Liturgy can range from:

- Very simple: a regular order of hymns, prayers, and Scripture readings.
- Highly formal: fixed prayers, responsive readings, creeds, vest-

ments, and ritual actions as in many Anglican, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic settings.

The Bible neither commands a detailed liturgy nor forbids one. It allows significant freedom to local assemblies, provided that worship is orderly, edifying, and consistent with sound doctrine.

The Theological Associations of Liturgy

In practice, liturgical forms are not neutral. They tend to carry associations with the traditions from which they come. More formal liturgies are usually associated with:

- Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic communions.
- Theologies that emphasize sacrament, tradition, and continuity with the historic church.

A church that historically has had a more “free church” or Baptist-like

ethos, such as many independent Christian churches, typically has:

- Simpler orders of service.
- Less scripted language.
- More emphasis on extempore prayer and preaching.

When such a church begins adopting more explicitly liturgical elements—especially if they resemble main-line or high-church patterns—it is, intentionally or not, signaling an affinity with those traditions. Over time, style often influences substance. Forms shape expectations, and expectations influence doctrine and practice.

Possible Motives and Cultural Factors

Several factors may be at work when ministers begin adding liturgical elements:

- **A desire for reverence and depth.** Some leaders feel that informal worship has become shallow and believe that more structured forms will foster seriousness and theological richness.
- **Cultural trends among younger adults.** In some contexts, younger people are increasingly drawn to historic, traditional, or “ancient-future” worship. They see liturgy as offering rootedness and stability.
- **Personal preference of the leadership.** Ministers who have been exposed to more liturgical traditions may simply prefer that style and, perhaps without fully intending it, begin moving their congregations in that direction.

None of these motives are necessarily malicious. However, even well-

intentioned changes can have long-term effects on a church’s doctrinal alignment and identity.

Congregational Identity and Pastoral Responsibility

A local church has a certain history, culture, and identity. Members have cast their lot with that body expecting a certain general approach to worship and doctrine. While change is sometimes needed, it should be:

- **Transparent:** the reasons are clearly explained.
- **Theologically grounded:** not driven merely by fashion or personal taste.
- **Sensitive:** taking into account the conscience and comfort of the congregation.

When ministers in an independent Christian church adopt forms closely associated with more formal traditions, they risk:

- **Confusing the congregation** about where the church stands doctrinally and ecclesiastically.
- **Opening the door for members,** especially younger ones, to later align with traditions whose theology may significantly differ from their own church’s original convictions.

For example, a young person accustomed to liturgical worship in an independent church may, upon moving, naturally gravitate to an Anglican or Roman Catholic parish because the worship “feels right,” even if the doctrine is different.

Practical Counsel

A few guiding observations:

- **Order is biblical; particular liturgies are optional.** Scripture endorses order but does not mandate responsive readings or fixed forms. Those elements are permissible but not required.
- **Form influences theology over time.** Adopting forms historically tied to certain theological systems tends to move people emotionally and intellectually toward those systems.
- **Local culture matters.** A worship style appropriate in one cultural setting may be alien or counterproductive in another. In some places, highly formal liturgy would empty the church; in others, it might be expected.

- **The congregation, not just the staff, should own major shifts.** Substantial changes to worship style should be made with broad congregational understanding and consent, not simply by ministerial preference.

Using occasional responsive readings or structured prayers, if done thoughtfully and with clear biblical content, need not be wrong. But a steady move toward a more fully liturgical style may, over time, identify the church more with traditions it originally stood apart from and may nudge the next generation toward those communions.

Leaders should therefore weigh not only whether a given practice is permissible, but also what it communicates about the church's identity and where it may lead the flock in the long run.



22 Distinguishing Law and Grace from Kingdom and Body

Question

Is rightly dividing the law from grace the same as rightly dividing the kingdom?

September 18, 2026

Answer

When people speak of “rightly dividing,” they often have several related distinctions in mind, and it is easy to collapse them into one. Distinguishing law from grace, however, is not identical to distinguishing the kingdom from the body of Christ, even though these categories overlap significantly.

A person who does not practice mid-Acts or classic dispensational right division can still recognize that there is a difference between law and grace. For instance, they might affirm that salvation is by grace and not by works, and see a basic contrast between Mosaic law and grace in Christ, without adopting a full dispensational framework. That shows that “dividing law from grace” in itself does not yet amount to full-orbed right division.

Overlapping but Distinct Divisions

Several common distinctions are often made:

- Law vs. grace
- Kingdom vs. body of Christ
- Prophecy vs. mystery
- Israel vs. the church
- Little flock vs. Pauline assembly

These are interconnected. For example:

- The kingdom program is prophesied; the body of Christ is a mystery, revealed later through Paul.
- Israel, under the law and under kingdom promises, is not the same as the church, the body of Christ, which is

neither Jew nor Gentile in its standing.

If you carefully distinguish prophecy from mystery, Israel from the church, and kingdom from body, you will necessarily come to a more precise distinction between law and grace than a non-dispensational reader typically has. Yet conceptually these are still different cuts.

Law and Grace as a Limited Division

Law vs. grace can be recognized in at least two ways:

1. As a general theological contrast: “The law condemns; grace saves.” Many theologians of various traditions confess something like this. They may still combine Israel and the church, prophecy and mystery, kingdom and body, while recognizing some contrast between law and grace.
2. As a dispensational division: understanding that the Mosaic law governed a specific covenant people (Israel) in a specific administration, whereas the present dispensation of grace, revealed through Paul, is not under that code, and is not the kingdom program.

The first sense does not require, and often does not include, a careful separation of kingdom promises to Israel from the mystery of the body of Christ. Thus

someone can “divide” law and grace at a basic level and yet not be rightly dividing in the broader dispensational sense.

Kingdom and Body as a Broader Division

To divide kingdom from body is to recognize at least the following:

- The kingdom was prophesied beforehand; it belongs to Israel’s covenants and promises.
- The body of Christ was not prophesied; it was a mystery revealed to and through Paul.
- The kingdom involves an earthly rule of Messiah over Israel and the nations; the body of Christ is a heavenly people, blessed in the heavens.

When you add to this:

- Prophecy vs. mystery
- Israel vs. the church

- Little flock vs. the Pauline assembly

you are now handling a whole complex of distinctions that go well beyond simply noticing that “grace is different from law.”

Conclusion

Dividing law from grace can be done, in a limited way, by someone who is not practicing full right division. Therefore it cannot be identical with rightly dividing kingdom from body.

A right divider will distinguish law and grace in a way that is consistent with the kingdom/body, Israel/church, prophecy/mystery distinctions; but the bare act of contrasting law and grace is not, by itself, the same thing as rightly dividing the kingdom from the body of Christ.



23 Degrees of Punishment in Eternal Judgment

Question

Is there anywhere in scripture that says that some people face hotter spots in the eternal fire depending on the life that they lived?

September 18, 2026

Answer

The familiar notion of “hotter spots in hell” often comes more from literary imagination (for example, Dante) than from exegesis. Yet Scripture does speak of differing accountability and judgment according to works. From this, many infer degrees of punishment, even if the exact imagery of “hotter spots” is not used.

Passages Indicating Differing Accountability

Several texts show that responsibility and judgment vary:

- **Luke 12:45–48** (parallel themes occur also in Matthew):

“But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of

stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”

Here there is explicit differentiation: “many stripes” vs. “few stripes,” grounded in how much a person knew.

- **Matthew 11:20–24:**

“Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.”

The phrase “more tolerable” at the day of judgment again suggests comparative severity.

- **Romans 2:5–6:**

“But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds.”

Judgment “according to his deeds” naturally implies some measure of proportionality.

• **Revelation 20:12–13:**

“And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. . . and they were judged every man according to their works.”

The repeated emphasis on “according to their works” is difficult to reconcile with a judgment that has no differentiation at all in its outcome.

From Judgment According to Works to Degrees of Punishment

The question is whether these differences in judgment pertain only to the process leading up to the final sentence, or whether they carry over into the experience of the lake of fire.

If all the wicked are judged “according to their works” and then all experience identically the same punishment with no variation, the phrase “according to their works” risks becoming practically empty. Similarly, “more tolerable” and “many vs. few stripes” would seem to point to real distinctions in the severity endured.

Thus, many interpreters reasonably infer that:

- Greater light and privilege bring greater guilt.
- Greater guilt results in a more severe judgment.

- This severity is ultimately expressed in differing degrees of punishment in final judgment.

The exact mechanics or “layout” of such degrees are not described. Scripture does not speak in terms of specific “levels” or “rings” of hell as in Dante. It speaks rather in comparative terms: more or less tolerable, many or few stripes, judgment according to works.

Lake of Fire and Uniformity

Revelation 20 concludes with the casting of the lost into the lake of fire. The text does not explicitly describe internal gradations within that state. Nevertheless, the prior insistence on judgment by works, and on differing tolerability, suggests that the final punishment is not a flat, undifferentiated experience.

We must also acknowledge the limits of our knowledge. Scripture affirms:

- There is an eternal punishment for the lost.
- Judgment is according to works, with greater accountability where there has been greater knowledge.
- Some will find the day of judgment “more tolerable” than others.

Beyond that, we see “through a glass, darkly.” It is reasonable to infer real differences of severity, but it is not safe to construct a detailed geography of hell.

Conclusion

Scripture does not use the phrase “hotter spots in hell,” but it does teach that judgment is according to works, that some

receive many stripes and others few, and that it will be more tolerable for some than for others in the day of judgment. On that basis, it is biblically warranted to

affirm degrees of punishment in eternal judgment, even while admitting Scripture does not map those degrees in the vivid way later literature has imagined.



24 Water Baptism in Judaism and the Ancient World

Question

Was water baptism a common practice in the ancient world or was it strictly or at least mostly a Jewish practice?

September 18, 2026

Answer

Baptism in the sense of ritual washing and purification was certainly a well-known Jewish practice prior to Christianity, but the broader ancient world also employed water in religious rites. So while Christian baptism and Jewish mikveh practice have specific theological meanings, the basic use of water for ritual purification was not exclusively Jewish.

Jewish Ritual Washings

Israel's law contains many instructions involving washing with water:

- Leviticus 15:27:

“Whosoever toucheth those things shall be un-

clean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even.”

Numerous such passages describe bathing and washing as means of ceremonial purification. Archaeology in the land of Israel confirms the presence of many mikva'ot (ritual baths) used for immersion and cleansing. By the time John the Baptist appeared, the idea of using water for purification was familiar; the people did not respond as if he had invented an entirely new concept.

Even Naaman's reaction in 2 Kings 5, objecting to washing in the Jordan rather

than in rivers of Syria, presupposes acquaintance with ritual washing. Paul, in Hebrews 6, refers to “baptisms” (plural) as elementary doctrine, implying that multiple forms of ceremonial washing were already understood by his audience.

Non-Jewish Religious Use of Water

The broader Greco-Roman world also used water ritually. There is evidence from Greek sanctuaries of water employed for purification before worship or sacrifice. Academic studies on “the ritual usage of water in Greek sanctuaries” show that:

- Water functioned as a purificatory agent for both persons and objects.
- Washings were performed in association with approach to temples and participation in rites.

Although terminology and exact practices vary, the underlying idea of approaching the sacred through some form of washing was not limited to Israel.

A probable example in Scripture of a pagan healing cult involving water is the pool of Bethesda in John 5. Many scholars identify connections with Greco-Roman healing shrines (such as those associated with Serapis or Asclepius), where water and its stirring were part of the healing expectation. Whatever precise identification is adopted, the narrative reflects a context in which water and healing were linked in a quasi-ritual manner.

Relation to Christian Baptism

When John came baptizing in the Jordan, he was not introducing the bare idea of

water as a purifying agent. What was distinct was:

- The prophetic call to national repentance in preparation for the kingdom.
- The specific symbolic meaning tied to Israel’s promised role as a kingdom of priests.

The New Testament’s use of baptism builds upon:

- Israel’s established practices of immersion and washing.
- The wider ancient association of water with cleansing in religious contexts.

Thus, while the theological meaning of Christian baptism is particular to the Christian message and to the dispensational context in which it is placed, the outward action of water immersion or washing was not a uniquely Jewish invention, nor exclusively Christian.

Conclusion

Water used for ritual purification was widespread in the ancient world. Judaism had a rich, law-based system of washings and immersions, and John’s baptism arose within that environment. Other ancient religions also used water in sanctuaries and rites. So water baptism, understood broadly as religious washing or immersion, was not strictly or mostly Jewish, though its specific covenantal meaning in Israel—and later its doctrinal meaning in Christianity—are distinctive.

25 The Timing of the Catching Up in 1 Thessalonians

4

Question

How do we know 1 Thessalonians 4:17 describes a future event rather than something that applied only to believers when Paul wrote it?

September 18, 2026

Answer

1 Thessalonians 4:17 says:

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

The question is whether this “catching up” was confined to Paul’s own generation or whether it is still future and includes believers today.

Mystery, Not Prophecy

In the immediate context, Paul introduces material the Thessalonians did not yet know:

- He says he does not want them to be ignorant concerning those who are asleep.
- He then reveals this catching up and the reunion of dead and living believers.

This stands in contrast with 1 Thessalonians 5:1ff., where he says they already

know about the “times and the seasons,” that is, about the coming “day of the Lord,” which had been prophesied.

So 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 is presented as new teaching (mystery), not as a restatement of known prophecy. That mystery concerns all who are “in Christ,” not only those alive at that first-century moment.

Paul’s Language and Expectation

Paul says, “we which are alive and remain.” This does not require that he dogmatically includes himself among those who will be alive at the event. It can naturally be read as:

“We believers who happen to be alive and remain at that time. . .”

Later, in 2 Timothy 4:6–8, Paul writes:

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. . .”

He clearly expects physical death, not translation, as his immediate future. That shows he did not revise the doctrine of 1 Thessalonians 4; rather, he understood that the catching up had not yet taken place and would outlast his earthly life.

The Logical Consequences if It Were Past

If 1 Thessalonians 4:17 described something already fulfilled in the first century, consider the implications:

- The dead in Christ would have risen, and the living in Christ would have been caught up.
- That would leave only the lost on earth, unless God restarted the same grace program after removing all its beneficiaries.

If, after this event, the same age of grace simply continues with the same kind of salvation message and church structure, then the catching up becomes a kind of temporary evacuation without dispensational consequence. Yet 1 Thessalonians 5 closely links the catching up with what follows—the day of the Lord, wrath, and sudden destruction—events that are not describing an already past age, but a future period of judgment.

Day of the Lord and Appointment to Wrath

In 1 Thessalonians 5:2–4, Paul speaks of the day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night, bringing sudden destruction upon “them.” He then contrasts:

“For when **they** shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon **them**. . .”

with

“But **ye**, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake **you** as a thief.”

And in 1 Thessalonians 5:9:

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The structure is:

1. A distinct event in which dead and living in Christ are caught up.
2. A subsequent period (the day of the Lord) characterized by wrath, which belongs to “them,” not “you.”

If the catching up were already past, we would have to say that the believers to whom Paul wrote had somehow missed the rapture, yet still remained in the same dispensation of grace, which contradicts the logic of the passage and of right division.

Dispensational Considerations

Right division holds that:

- The body of Christ has a distinct destiny, not appointed to wrath.
- The day of the Lord corresponds to a prophetic program (Israel, law, kingdom).

The catching up of all who are in Christ ends the present grace dispensation and precedes the day of the Lord. Since we are clearly not living under restored Mosaic law or in manifest kingdom conditions, and since the global day-of-the-Lord scenario described by prophecy has not occurred, the catching up that triggers that transition has not yet taken place.

Conclusion

We know 1 Thessalonians 4:17 describes a still-future event because:

- Paul presents it as a new mystery truth, not confined to his own generation.
- Paul himself later anticipates death, not having experienced such a catching up.
- The event removes all “in Christ,” which has not historically occurred.
- It is tightly linked to the future day of the Lord, a period of wrath from which the body of Christ is exempt and which has not yet been fulfilled.

Therefore, 1 Thessalonians 4:17 remains a future promise for all believers in Christ.



26 Wrath Versus Curse in Biblical Theology

Question

What's the difference between God's wrath and the curse for breaking the law of Moses?

September 18, 2026

Answer

The concepts of “wrath” and “curse” distinguish covenantal curses from the overlap in that both involve judgment and negative consequences, but they are not identical. Scripture uses them in somewhat different ways, especially when we

distinguish covenantal curses from the broader idea of God's wrath.

Curse as Specific Sanction

In many passages, a curse is a particular, often covenantal, sanction:

- In Deuteronomy 28, blessings and curses are laid out for Israel. If Israel obeys, blessings follow; if Israel disobeys, curses follow.
- A curse frequently appears with an “if-then” structure (explicit or implied): if you do this, then this judgment will come.
- Curses often attach to particular covenant obligations (for example, the Mosaic covenant) or to specific pronouncements (such as the curse on the ground in Genesis).

So a curse is typically:

- Pronounced in relation to a defined obligation.
- Concrete in its description (famine, exile, disease, etc.).
- Often temporal and historical, even though some curses may have long-lasting or eschatological effects.

Wrath as General Indignation and Judgment

“Wrath” tends to denote God’s righteous indignation expressed against sin more broadly:

- It need not be tied to a single covenant code.
- It can be directed against ungodliness in general, not just against Israel under the law.
- It is often eschatological in emphasis: a coming “day of wrath,” a period in which God’s anger is fully revealed.

For instance, in 1 Thessalonians 5:9:

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Here “wrath” is not simply “Mosaic covenant curses”; it is a broader eschatological outpouring associated with the day of the Lord.

Isaiah 24 and the Curse

Isaiah 24 says:

“The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth. . .”

This “curse” can be related to:

- The primeval curse on the earth in Genesis.
- The accumulated effect of human rebellion against God’s ordinances.

It is more than just Deuteronomy 28 repeated; it is the outworking of God’s judgment on a world that has fundamentally violated His order. That said, the language of “curse” here still ties judgment to a breach of covenant and law (“transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant”).

Comparing the Two

We can outline the distinction this way:

- **Curse**

- Often tied to a specific covenant or command.
- Functions as a defined sanction for disobedience.
- May be temporal or eschatological, but is typically concrete and particular.

• **Wrath**

- God’s righteous anger against sin more generally.
- Not limited to one covenant people.
- Prominently associated with eschatological judgment (for example, the day of wrath).

All curses are manifestations of God’s judgment, and so in a broad sense they reflect His wrath. But not all references to wrath are simply the execution of a specific covenant curse. Wrath can encompass a wider range of judgments, including those that fall outside the Mosaic code.

Believers and Wrath

In a rightly divided framework:

- Israel under the law was subject to covenant curses for disobedience.

- The body of Christ is not under that law and its covenant curses.
- Moreover, believers are “not appointed to wrath” (1 Thessalonians 5:9), that is, to the coming eschatological outpouring associated with the day of the Lord.

Thus:

- The curses of the Mosaic law belong to Israel’s covenantal relationship and its history.
- The wrath from which the body of Christ is exempt is a broader, future judgment upon a Christ-rejecting world.

Conclusion

“Curse” generally denotes a specific, often covenant-related sanction pronounced for disobedience, whereas “wrath” denotes God’s broader righteous indignation against sin, especially as it will be revealed in future judgment. The two concepts intersect, but they are not interchangeable, and understanding the distinction is important for seeing how Israel’s covenant history and the body of Christ’s future hope differ.

27 Moses and the Triune Nature of God in Theophany

Question

When Moses met with God, was he meeting with the first or second person of the Trinity?

September 22, 2026

Answer

When we ask whether Moses met with the first or second member of the Trinity, we are bringing later theological categories back onto a text that does not itself articulate them. The Hebrew Scriptures do not present a developed doctrine of the Trinity. They present God as one, with occasional hints of plurality that only become clear in light of later revelation.

That means we must be cautious: God has always been who he is (Father, Son, Spirit), but Israel was not given a full trinitarian explanation. So the question is legitimate, but Scripture may not give an explicit, final answer.

I prefer to speak of the “members” of the Trinity rather than “persons,” because in modern English “person” usually connotes a full human composite of body, soul, and spirit. Humans are one person comprised of body, soul, and spirit. A body alone is not a person, nor is a disembodied soul or spirit, strictly speaking. The old Latin *persona* likely carried different connotations than our word “person.” For clarity, I will speak of three “members” in the one God.

Re-reading Old Testament theophanies in trinitarian light

In the Old Testament, God is simply “God,” “the LORD,” or sometimes “the angel of the LORD.” Our trinitarian reading comes from the New Testament and is then read back into those texts. That is not wrong, but it goes beyond what an Old Testament reader would have inferred.

We assume God was triune in Moses’s day. The question is whether the text itself distinguishes between Father, Son, and Spirit in Moses’s encounters. It rarely, if ever, does so in an explicit way.

The burning bush: Exodus 3 and Acts 7

Consider Moses’s first encounter at the burning bush.

“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.”

Exodus 3:2

Then:

“And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.”

Exodus 3:4

We have:

- “the angel of the LORD” appearing,
- “the LORD” seeing,
- “God” calling out of the midst of the bush.

The simplest reading is that “the angel of the LORD” in verse 2 is identified with “the LORD” and “God” in verse 4. This is more than a created angel; it is a theophany.

Stephen recounts this in Acts 7:30–32:

“There appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

Stephen speaks of:

- “an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire,”
- “the voice of the Lord,”

- identifying himself as “the God of thy fathers.”

By the time of Stephen, the early believers understood the Son as the one who uniquely reveals the Father. Yet Stephen does not explicitly say, “This was Christ.” He simply narrates the theophany as “the Lord.”

Still, we have several clues often used to associate Old Testament visible manifestations of God with the Son:

- A visible manifestation (“appeared . . . in a flame of fire”),
- A speaking presence (“the voice of the Lord came unto him”),
- Self-identification as the God of the patriarchs.

Visibility, speech, and trinitarian roles

Many theologians (and I am sympathetic to this) suggest an analogy between the human composite and the triune God:

- Body → Son,
- Soul → Father,
- Spirit → Holy Spirit.

In this analogy:

- The *soul* is the “I” that wills and purposes,
- The *spirit* is the animating, expressive principle (breath, word),
- The *body* is the visible manifestation.

Romans 1 indicates that visible things teach us about God’s invisible nature, so this analogy is not absurd. If it is valid, then:

- The Father (as “soul”) is never directly seen;
- He is made known through the Son (as “body”);

- He speaks through the Spirit (as “breath”/“word”).

Thus, whenever God is seen, one could argue it is always “through” the Son; whenever God’s word is heard, it is “through” the Spirit. Yet it is still the one God acting; we must not think of three separate deities taking turns.

Face to face with the LORD: Exodus 33 and John 1

In Exodus 33:11 we read:

“And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.”

Later in the same chapter Moses asks:

“I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.”

Exodus 33:18

God responds:

“Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.”

Exodus 33:20

And again:

“Thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.”

Exodus 33:23

Here:

- Verse 11: “face to face” must be an idiom for direct, intimate communication, since,

- Verse 20: no man can see God’s face and live.

This aligns with John 1:18:

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

No one has seen God (the Father) at any time. The Son “declares” him, that is, makes him known. On the analogy above, the Father as “soul” is never directly seen; he is seen only as manifested in the Son, and heard only as expressed by the Spirit.

Thus one could say:

- Moses did not see the Father as such;
- He encountered God as revealed in a theophany, which, in trinitarian terms, is “through” the Son and “by” the Spirit.

Christ in the wilderness: 1 Corinthians 10

1 Corinthians 10:1–4 adds another piece:

“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; . . . And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.”

Paul states that “that Rock was Christ.” This shows Christ present and active with

Israel in the wilderness. It strongly supports the idea that the second member of the Trinity was personally involved in Israel's history, including Moses's day.

It does not prove that *every* theophany is exclusively the Son, but it shows that Christ is not absent from these events. The Rock providing spiritual drink is identified with Christ, not merely with an impersonal symbol.

Can we decide between “first” and “second” member?

Putting this together:

- The Old Testament does not explicitly say, “Moses met the Father” or “Moses met the Son.”
- The New Testament says no man has seen God (the Father) at any time, and that the Son declares him.
- Paul asserts Christ was present with Israel in the wilderness.
- Many visible manifestations of God in the Old Testament are reasonably identified as appearances of the Son.

Therefore, from a trinitarian, New Testament vantage point, the best we can say is:

1. Moses truly met with *God*—the one God, not a lesser being.
2. In terms of the members of the Trinity, the manifestation is most naturally associated with the Son, who is the fullness of the Godhead bodily and the one who makes the unseen God known.
3. At the same time, any such encounter is inseparable from the Father and the Spirit. God does not divide himself into parts when he appears or speaks.

So, “Was Moses meeting the first or second member?” Theologically, one can say: Moses encountered the one God, and that encounter, as a visible and audible manifestation, is most fittingly understood as God revealed through the Son, by the agency of the Spirit, while never excluding the Father whose presence and purpose underlie the whole event.

28 Right Division and the Distinction of Prophecy and Mystery

Question

Hi Randy, hi Annie. Where in 2 Timothy 2:15 do we get the idea of rightly dividing between prophecy and mystery?

September 22, 2026

Answer

2 Timothy 2:15 commands:

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

The verse clearly enjoins “rightly dividing” the word of truth, but it does not itself specify *which* division—prophecy vs. mystery, law vs. grace, Israel vs. the body of Christ, etc. The instruction is general: handle the word by making the proper distinctions that the text itself requires.

So the specific distinction between prophecy and mystery is not explicit in 2 Timothy 2:15; it is derived from other Pauline passages that describe two categories of revelation.

Where prophecy and mystery are contrasted

Paul speaks of two kinds of revelation:

- Truth “spoken since the world began,”

- Truth “kept secret since the world began.”

This distinction appears, for example, in Romans and Ephesians. In Ephesians 3, Paul describes “the mystery”:

(Paraphrasing Paul’s argument) There was a mystery “in other ages” not made known as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, namely, that Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel he preaches.

This mystery:

- Was “hidden in God,”
- Was not revealed in previous ages as it is now,
- Concerns the body of Christ and the present dispensation of grace.

By contrast, prophetic truth in the Old Testament is “spoken since the world began.” It is publicly revealed, proclaimed

through the prophets, and forms the content of Israel's covenants and kingdom hope.

Thus, when we obey 2 Timothy 2:15 and ask how to "rightly divide," one major division we discover is:

- *Prophecy*: things spoken and known from the beginning (Israel's covenants, kingdom promises, earthly reign, etc.),
- *Mystery*: truth previously hidden, now revealed through Paul—the body of Christ, the present dispensation, heavenly position, etc.

How 2 Timothy 2:15 points toward this division

The Greek term translated "rightly dividing" has the idea of cutting straight, making a correct partition. It implies more than generic "accurate handling"; it implies distinguishing and separating in a proper way.

2 Timothy 2:15 itself does not list all the lines along which we must divide, but when we read it alongside Paul's explanation of the mystery, we see that:

- Scripture itself presents two non-identical bodies of revelation: that which was foretold (prophecy) and that which was kept secret (mystery).
- These cannot be merged without confusion; they must be "cut straight," that is, distinguished from each other.

That is why those who emphasize right division see prophecy vs. mystery as the central Pauline division, even though the wording "prophecy and mystery" does not occur in 2 Timothy 2:15.

Other connected distinctions

Once someone begins to take 2 Timothy 2:15 seriously and asks, "What is it I must divide?" they often arrive, step by step, at related distinctions:

- Israel vs. Gentiles,
- Law vs. grace,
- Israel vs. the body of Christ,
- Earthly kingdom promises vs. heavenly spiritual blessings.

These all converge on the broader prophecy/mystery divide:

- Israel, under law, with earthly kingdom promises, belongs to the prophetic program spoken from the beginning;
- The body of Christ, under grace, with heavenly blessings, belongs to the mystery program revealed through Paul.

Why the verse is not self-evident to all

Because 2 Timothy 2:15 does not spell out "divide prophecy from mystery," many sincere students—pastors included—accept the duty to "study" but never grasp that Paul's mystery is a *distinct* body of truth. They often interpret "rightly dividing" as merely "interpreting correctly."

Only when one allows Paul to define "mystery" as something:

- Not known in other ages,
- Now uniquely revealed to and through him,

does the need for a structural division emerge. Then 2 Timothy 2:15 becomes the methodological instruction (rightly divide), and Ephesians 3, Romans 16 and related passages supply a major content division (prophecy vs. mystery).

So, the idea of dividing between prophecy and mystery is not generated from the wording of 2 Timothy 2:15 alone. Rather, that verse requires us to make divisions, and Paul's teaching about the

mystery shows that one of the chief divisions, if we take him seriously, is between what God foretold through the prophets and what he kept hidden until the present dispensation.



29 The One New Man and the Seed of Abraham

Question

Are we the one new man all Abraham's seed?

September 22, 2026

Answer

Believers today, in this dispensation, are collectively the "one new man," the body of Christ. Paul also says that those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed. The key question is whether those phrases are strictly identical and what is meant by being "Abraham's seed."

The one new man

In Paul's teaching, the "one new man" is a new creation in which:

- Jew and Gentile are reconciled in one body by the cross,
- Neither group is absorbed into the other,

- It is not Gentiles becoming part of Israel, nor Israel losing identity and merging into Gentiles.

The one new man is a new entity, the body of Christ, distinct from Israel as a nation and from the Gentile nations.

Christ as the singular seed of Abraham

Galatians 3:16 states:

"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

Paul is very precise:

- The promises were made to Abraham and to *his seed*,
- He explicitly denies that this refers to “seeds” (many),
- He identifies the seed as *Christ*.

So in the strict sense, Abraham’s seed—the heir of the promises—is Christ himself, not a multitude of individuals.

Believers in Christ as Abraham’s seed

Later in the same chapter, Paul writes:

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Galatians 3:26–29

Key points:

- We are “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,”
- We are “one in Christ Jesus,”
- Our being Abraham’s seed is conditional: “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed.”

We are not each independently Abraham’s seed in the way Christ is. Rather, because we are *in Christ*, who is the seed, we are reckoned as Abraham’s seed. It is our union with Christ—the true seed—that grants us that status.

Answering the question precisely

The question asks: “Are we the one new man all Abraham’s seed?”

We can answer on two levels.

1. As individuals considered apart from Christ

Individually, if we think of ourselves as separate “seeds” of Abraham, inheriting his promises in our own right, we contradict Galatians 3:16, which denies that the promises were made to “seeds” as of many. The promises focus on one seed, Christ.

So in that sense, we should *not* think of ourselves as multiple Abrahamic “seeds” standing alongside Christ.

2. As the one new man in union with Christ

Collectively, believers form the body of Christ, the one new man. This body is:

- United to Christ, the singular seed of Abraham,
- Counted as Abraham’s seed because we are “Christ’s.”

Thus, as the one new man—understood as the body of Christ—we can say “we are Abraham’s seed” in a representational or participatory sense: we share in what belongs to Christ because we are in him.

So:

- The one new man (the body of Christ) is Abraham’s seed *by virtue of being in Christ*, the seed.
- We are not each, in isolation from Christ, Abraham’s seed in the same primary sense that he is.

Therefore, if “all” in the question means “each believer as an independent Abrahamic heir apart from Christ,” the answer is no. If “all” refers to the entire one new man as united to Christ, then yes:

the one new man is reckoned Abraham’s seed because it is the body of Christ, and Christ is the seed to whom the promises were made.



30 Human Origins and the Question of Cavemen

Question

Were there really cavemen?

September 22, 2026

Answer

The popular image of “cavemen” usually means biologically primitive humans in a half-developed stage of evolution—grunting, barely intelligent creatures slowly “becoming” human. Scripture does not support that picture.

Scripture’s portrayal of early man

From the beginning, man is created fully human and responsible:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God said unto them, Be

fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion . . .”

Genesis 1:27–28

Humanity is:

- Made in God’s image,
- Given dominion and responsibility,
- Capable of language, moral choice, and cultural development.

In Genesis 4, early post-Fall humanity shows advanced abilities:

- Cain builds a city (Genesis 4:17),
- Jabal is “the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle” (Genesis 4:20),

- Jubal is “the father of all such as handle the harp and organ” (Genesis 4:21),
- Tubalcain is “an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron” (Genesis 4:22).

These are not crude half-humans. They build cities, practice animal husbandry, develop musical instruments, and work metals. The biblical picture is of fully capable, intelligent people from early on.

People who lived in caves

The Bible and archaeology both attest that some people lived in caves. But living in a cave does not make one biologically primitive; it is an environmental or social choice.

David, for example, stayed in caves while fleeing Saul (e.g., Adullam), yet he was not a sub-human “caveman.” Caves could provide:

- Shelter,
- Defense,
- Temporary refuge.

Job 30:5–6 speaks of displaced, impoverished people:

“They were driven forth from among men, (they cried after them as after a thief;) To dwell in the cliffs of the valleys, in caves of the earth, and in the rocks.”

Here, cave-dwellers are socially marginalized, not biologically primitive. They are driven out, not halfway evolved.

Archaeological sites with cliff or cave dwellings (for example, those in the American Southwest) often show:

- Planned architecture,
- Religious practice,
- Tools, art, and trade.

Again, such dwellers are clearly fully human, using caves for practical reasons.

Answering the question

If by “cavemen” one means:

- Crude, sub-human ancestors in the process of evolving into modern humans,

then, on biblical grounds, the answer is no. Humanity begins as fully human, in the image of God, with complex skills evident early in history.

If by “cavemen” one means:

- People who, for various reasons, lived in caves (refugees, nomads, communities using natural shelter),

then yes, such people certainly existed and still can exist. But they are not a separate, less-developed biological stage of man.

So there were cave-dwellers, but not “cavemen” in the evolutionary sense commonly portrayed.

31 Natural Law, Prayer, and the Mid-Acts Perspective

Question

In your opinion, does the central point of this video support the Mid-Acts perspective on prayer and its outcome?

September 22, 2026

Answer

The central thrust of the video very closely parallels what I would teach from a Mid-Acts, right-division perspective on prayer in this present age. The speaker is not a Mid-Acts dispensationalist, but his functional view of how God's world operates, and how prayer relates to that operation, is strikingly similar.

He argues that God governs His creation through laws which produce predictable results, and that prayer does not override these established systems. He uses the law of gravity as an example: gravity does not care whether you prayed, had a quiet time, or read your Bible. If you jump, you fall. This is simply acknowledging that God has built a world in which certain physical and moral laws operate consistently.

From a Mid-Acts viewpoint, we are in an age characterized by the silence of God in terms of direct, visible interventions. God has set in place ordered structures—physical, social, and sowing-and-reaping principles—and ordinarily works through those, not in suspension of them. The speaker's insistence that “prayer can-

not replace principles” fits this framework well.

Prayer and Established Principles

The speaker quotes the principle, “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,” and then builds out examples:

- Stewardship tends toward increase.
- Generosity tends toward multiplication.
- Diligence tends toward promotion.
- Laziness tends toward lack.

In general, these reflect biblical wisdom. As I noted, he ventures too far if he treats these as absolutely unbreakable like gravity—one can be lazy and still inherit money or win a lottery. But as broad patterns, these observations align with how God's moral order typically functions.

From a Mid-Acts standpoint, this is essentially how believers should think about outcomes in this age: not as the result of God randomly distributing circumstantial blessings or hardships, but as the outworking of built-in structures and principles He has ordained. Prayer is significant and

powerful, but it does not abolish cause-and-effect in life and society.

Mysticism and “Random Blessing” Theology

The speaker criticizes the idea that God is randomly choosing winners and losers and that prayer can serve as a mystical shortcut to success. That critique also matches a Mid-Acts approach. Much contemporary Christianity has drifted into a kind of mysticism: “Type ‘amen’ and God will bless you,” or “Say this prayer and expect a financial miracle,” as if formulaic prayers override how God has structured the world.

Right division recognizes that in the present dispensation, God has not promised Israel-like theocratic interventions for the body of Christ. We are not under Israel’s covenant program of visible, circumstantial blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. Instead, we live in an era in which we walk by faith in God’s revelation, within a world that continues to run on stable patterns He designed.

Under that framework, prayer is not a substitute for wisdom, labor, stewardship, or moral responsibility. Rather, we pray:

- For wisdom to live well within God’s ordered world.
- For strength, patience, and godliness amid its difficulties.
- For open doors for the gospel and boldness in witness.

- With thanksgiving in all things, recognizing God’s overarching providence.

But we do not treat prayer as a mechanism to suspend gravity, sowing-and-reaping, or other ordinary structures of life.

Where the Video and Mid-Acts Overlap

Thus, to answer the question directly: the central point of the video supports, in substance, a Mid-Acts perspective on prayer and its outcome in this age.

- It acknowledges that God rules through stable laws and systems.
- It denies that God is arbitrarily distributing success and failure in response to piety as evangelicals often imagine.
- It insists that principles and choices carry their own consequences—built into the “seed,” as he puts it.
- It insists that prayer cannot replace those principles.

All of this resonates strongly with a Mid-Acts, right-division understanding: we are in a dispensation where God has revealed His grace and instructions, but is not visibly manipulating every circumstance in response to individual prayers.

I would refine some of his applications and avoid a few overstatements, but overall, yes: the core perspective he articulates is very much in line with a Mid-Acts view of prayer and outcomes in the present age.

32 Scofield, 1 John 5:7, and Textual Criticism

Question

You addressed 1 John 5:7 in your April edition. I have an additional question. I note that the old Scofield study Bible that Dr. Scofield states on page 1325 by way of an added note. It is generally agreed that verse 7 has no real authority and has been inserted. This note is upsetting for me to read. What were his views on manuscripts to come to such a conclusion here?

September 23, 2026

Answer

The Scofield note you cite—"It is generally agreed that verse 7 has no real authority and has been inserted"—reflects Scofield's textual philosophy in his day, not a robust doctrine of verbal preservation as many of us would hold now.

The Text of 1 John 5:7–8

In the King James Version, 1 John 5:7–8 reads:

"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

Most modern translations omit the heavenly witness clause ("in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and

these three are one") and often also omit "in earth." They typically reduce the text functionally to: "For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree."

This omission is based on the so-called "Johannine comma," which is absent from most of the manuscripts favored by modern textual critics. Scofield's marginal and center-column notes follow that same judgment.

Scofield's Historical Context

Scofield's notes first appeared in 1909, and the "old Scofield" revision was completed in 1917. That period was very close to the cresting influence of Westcott and Hort, the discovery and promotion of Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, and the publication of the Revised Version and American Standard Version.

The full modern debate between:

- Textus Receptus (and family),

- critical text (Westcott–Hort and successors),
- and questions of providential preservation

had not yet developed in the way we know it now. The fruit of critical approaches, and the downstream doctrinal and practical consequences, were not as visible.

Scofield retained the Authorized Version as his base text, but in his introductory remarks he speaks of nineteenth-century textual critics having corrected what he calls minor inaccuracies. That language itself shows he did not hold to a strong doctrine of the specific preservation of the traditional text. He was willing to say that the received form of the Greek text underlying the KJV contained errors which newer scholarly work could refine.

He also:

- Placed preferred alternative readings, often drawn from the revised text tradition, in his margins and notes.
- Spoke favorably of leading textual critics of his day (for example, Tregelles and others).
- Reflected the general scholarly consensus of that time, which tended to favor the newer critical text families over the traditional text.

This explains both his dismissal of the Johannine comma and his note to “omit in earth” in verse 8. He was simply following the then-current critical judgment, which was moving away from the full KJV reading.

How to Evaluate Scofield’s Position

Several points are worth holding together.

1. His stance was consistent with his textual philosophy

Scofield believed that the work of nineteenth-century textual critics had improved the Greek text, and that some passages in the KJV reflected readings that should be adjusted. His comments on 1 John 5:7–8 are consistent with that view. He regarded the comma as a late insertion, and so wrote his note accordingly.

2. He did not possess the benefit of later debate

Much of the later, careful argumentation for a providentially preserved text and a robust defense of the traditional readings developed after Scofield’s era. In 1909, the full consequences of the new textual theories were still not widely recognized. It is not realistic to project our present level of documentation, criticism, and awareness back onto him and assume he should have anticipated all of it.

If he lived today with access to the accumulated debate and the evident theological drift that has often accompanied critical-text trajectories, I strongly suspect he might land closer to where you and I land—favoring the inclusion of 1 John 5:7 as in the KJV.

3. We need not throw out his theological work

Scofield’s dispensational contributions were significant, and God used his reference Bible in shaping many students of Scripture. At the same time, his

textual-critical stance is a serious weakness. The right response is neither hagiography nor blanket rejection, but sober evaluation: gratefully receive the strengths, and clearly reject the errors.

On 1 John 5:7–8, I am persuaded the full KJV text should be retained. The comma belongs there. Scofield’s note is incorrect at that point, a direct product of his accommodation to critical-text scholarship.

Implications for Readers Today

The disturbing nature of Scofield’s note should remind us:

- Not to vest too much final authority in any study Bible or expositor.

- To distinguish between a teacher’s doctrinal and dispensational insights and his textual decisions.
- To be explicit in our own time that Scripture is not improved by “correction” from ever-changing critical theories.

So, what manuscript views led Scofield to that conclusion? He accepted the emerging scholarly consensus that preferred the newer critical manuscripts over the traditional text, assumed they had “corrected” the older form in minor ways, and therefore judged the Johannine comma to be an interpolation. That judgment flows from his textual-critical commitments, not from a strong doctrine of the settled, preserved text of Scripture.



33 Choosing a Spouse Without Mysticism

Question

How should a believer choose a spouse? Should we wait for God to reveal the one or give special confirmation before moving forward in a relationship?

September 23, 2026

Answer

A believer should choose a spouse by applying biblical boundaries and sound judgment, not by mystical methods or waiting for private revelations about “the one.”

Rejecting Mystical Approaches

Waiting for God to “reveal the one,” seeking handwriting on the wall, a still small voice, or special signs before moving forward is not how Christians are instructed to make this decision. That is mysticism, not biblical wisdom.

Nor do I believe that God has predestined a single soulmate in the sense that, from eternity past, He fixed one specific person for you and is secretly orchestrating all circumstances so that the two of you must meet. Scripture does not teach that view of marital predestination.

Marriage as a Responsible Choice

Marriage is a real choice within divinely given boundaries. Biblically, you:

- Set clear scriptural parameters (for example, a believer marrying another believer, moral purity, ability and willingness to fulfill marital roles).
- Use reason and discernment to find someone who fits those parameters.
- Enter the covenant, then live out the responsibilities God assigns to husbands and wives.

A man who marries is then called to love his wife sacrificially, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. A

woman who marries is called to respect and submit to her husband as unto the Lord. The success of the marriage lies not in having mystically located “the one,” but in faithfully living those roles once the choice is made.

Avoiding Excessive Pickiness

Some people burden themselves with a long, rigid list of non-biblical preferences—beyond basic scriptural requirements—and effectively ensure they will never be satisfied. Personal preferences are not wrong, but if you treat minor quirks or differences in taste as disqualifying, you will likely remain single or be chronically discontent.

Focus on:

- Shared faith and capacity to grow together theologically.
- Character traits (honesty, self-control, responsibility).
- Capacity to love, forgive, and persevere.

Practical Counsel for Men

For a young man seeking a wife, look for a woman:

- Whose company you genuinely enjoy.
- Whose way of speaking and presenting herself you respect.
- Who carries herself with modesty and self-respect.
- Who has a clean mouth and knows how to speak with grace.

- Who cares for herself, and shows the disposition to care wisely for a household.
- Whose family traits, especially visible in her mother and older female relatives, are traits you can live with as she ages.

Practical Counsel for Women

For a young woman seeking a husband, look for a man:

- Who shows initiative and is not afraid of work.
- Who will embrace everyday responsibilities: providing, maintaining a home, protecting his family.
- Who may have ordinary “guy” interests, but is not enslaved to idleness.
- Who can clean himself up, behave maturely, and exercise self-discipline.
- Who has convictions about right and wrong, and some sense of re-

sponsibility toward his community and country.

The Role of Prayer

Prayer has a proper place in all this, but not as a means of obtaining secret information about a hidden soulmate. You pray:

- For wisdom to discern character.
- For purity in your own life and motives.
- For contentment in the Lord, whether single or married.
- For guidance in applying Scripture—not for private, extra-biblical messages.

So a believer should choose a spouse by honoring biblical boundaries, exercising sober judgment, and seeking wisdom from God’s revealed Word, rather than waiting passively for mystical confirmation or a special revelation about “the one.”



34 Evaluating the Amplified Bible as a Study Tool

Question

Is the Amplified Bible reliable? Does it really capture the full meaning of the Greek and Hebrew or does that claim overstate what a translation can do?

September 23, 2026

Answer

The Amplified Bible can be a useful study tool, but it should not be treated as your primary Bible or as if it fully captures every nuance of the original languages.

What the Amplified Bible Is Trying to Do

Every word in Hebrew or Greek has a lexical range—a spread of possible meanings that can vary with context. Traditional translations select one rendering in each verse, often with notes or commentaries explaining alternative nuances.

The Amplified Bible attempts to bring more of that lexical range into the verse itself by:

- Inserting explanatory or interpretive phrases, often in brackets.
- Providing alternative or expanded senses of a word in parentheses.

For example, where the King James Version reads in Isaiah 23:1, “The burden of Tyre,” the Amplified Bible reads something like, “The mournful, inspired oracle (a burden to be carried) concerning Tyre,” then may footnote that this is an urgent message which the prophet is compelled to proclaim.

Translation Mixed With Commentary

Because of this approach, the Amplified Bible is not a straightforward translation. It is a translation woven together with running commentary and interpretive expansion. That does not mean the commentary is always wrong; often it reflects reason-

able theological and lexical judgments. But it does mean:

- You are not reading a “pure text” only.
- You are constantly receiving the editors’ interpretations inside the verse.

In that sense, using it is somewhat like reading with a commentary open, except the commentary is interlaced with the text and signaled by brackets or parentheses.

Reliability and Limits

I would not accuse the publishers of intentionally misleading readers. In many places, their expansions accurately reflect the general sense of the passage. They also make relatively clear by typography what is text and what is expansion.

However:

- It does not, and cannot, “capture the full meaning” of Greek and Hebrew. No translation, amplified or otherwise, can exhaust all possible nuances.
- It necessarily makes interpretive decisions, and those decisions can be mistaken.
- It is based on the critical text rather than the Textus Receptus, so underlying textual differences from the King James will appear, especially in the New Testament.

Because of that, the Amplified Bible is best used as a secondary resource. I recommend using a stable primary text such as the King James Version, and then

consulting the Amplified Bible as one more tool for exploring possible shades of meaning—while still questioning its assumptions.

A Better Way to Think of It

If you regard the Amplified Bible as:

- A hybrid of translation and commentary.
- A quick way to see some of the lexical range behind key words.
- A resource whose expansions you test rather than accept uncritically.

then it can serve you well.

If you treat it as a definitive representation of the “full meaning” of the original languages, or as your main Bible, you are asking it to do more than any translation or paraphrastic expansion should be trusted to do.

Used with discernment, alongside a more literal primary translation, the Amplified Bible can be helpful; but it remains a study aid, not the standard by which other Bibles are measured.



35 Genesis 6 and Romans 11 in Dispensational Perspective

Question

Can we make a meaningful connection between Genesis 6:12 and Romans 11:22?
Are they similar with one referring to the past and the other to the future?

September 23, 2026

Answer

There is a meaningful parallel between these passages, particularly at the level of principle: God responds to corruption and unbelief by cutting off, and He responds to continued goodness and faithfulness by continuing His favor.

The Two Texts

Genesis 6:12 (KJV) reads:

“And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had

corrupted his way upon the earth.”

This is immediately before the judgment of the flood in Noah’s day. Humanity had corporately corrupted God’s way, and God responded with a decisive, catastrophic judgment.

Romans 11:22 (KJV) reads:

“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.”

Here Paul is speaking corporately, in a dispensational context, about Israel (the natural branches) and Gentiles (the wild olive branches). The Gentiles have been placed in a position of privilege, but they face being “cut off” if they do not continue in God’s goodness.

Past and Future Corporateness

In Genesis 6:12, the focus is on corporate humanity in the era of Noah. “All flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth,” and God judged that corruption through the flood. It is a past, historical example of worldwide corruption provoking worldwide judgment.

In Romans 11:22, Paul is dealing with the corporate standing of Israel and the Gentiles in God’s unfolding plan. Israel’s unbelief has led to her being broken off; Gentile inclusion is now in view, conditioned on continuing in God’s goodness.

If Gentiles as a body become characterized by unbelief and corruption, they too will be cut off, and Israel grafted in again.

So, yes, one text looks back to a past corporate corruption and judgment; the other anticipates future corporate dealings—especially in prophetic and tribulational contexts.

The Nature of “Cutting Off”

In Genesis, “cutting off” takes the form of physical judgment by flood—widespread death. In Romans 11, the primary sense is dispensational: loss of a privileged place in God’s dealings, and Israel’s restoration to that place.

Yet if Gentile apostasy and corruption intensify as described elsewhere in Scripture, and if severe judgment falls in the tribulation, the parallel with Genesis 6 becomes even stronger. Large segments of humanity again face destruction, not this time by water but through the judgments recorded in prophetic texts.

A Needed Clarification

It is important not to misuse Romans 11:22 as a proof that an individual believer can lose salvation if he or she fails to “continue in his goodness.” The context is clearly corporate and dispensational, not individual and soteriological.

Within that proper framework, however, your connection is sound: Genesis 6 illustrates God’s response to global corruption in the past; Romans 11 anticipates God’s response to corporate Gentile failure in the future. Both reveal the same

pattern: the goodness and severity of God toward humanity as it either corrupts His way or continues in His goodness.



36 The Christian Life Series in Written Format

Question

Is the Christian life available in written form?

September 24, 2026

Answer

The series I have taught on the Christian life is only partially available in written book form at this time. I have begun turning that material into a book, but as of now I have only completed chapters one and two of what I expect to be about five chapters in total. So there is not yet a fully edited, published book available.

However, the study notes are available. If you go to studyyourbible.org and search for “Christian life” or simply “Christ,” you will find PDF outline notes for the series. It appears there were eight sessions in that teaching series, and the outlines for those sessions are accessible there. They are not

in narrative book style but in an outline format. Still, they contain the substance of the teaching and can be read and studied.

My intention is to move that material into a more polished written form and put it into a book format. I have not yet done so because of a combination of perfectionism about tone and consistency, and the practical busyness of other responsibilities. Your interest in reading that material, however, is a helpful nudge to raise the priority of completing and publishing it. In the meantime, the available PDFs at studyyourbible.org are the best written-form resource for that series.

37 Saints and the One New Man in Ephesians

Question

Are there no saints in the one new man of Ephesians 2:15?

September 24, 2026

Answer

Ephesians 2:15 describes Christ as

“having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.”

The “one new man” is the body of Christ, composed of both Jew and Gentile in a new entity that is neither Jew nor Gentile in its standing. The question is whether “saints,” as the New Testament uses the term, are present in that one new man.

I hold that there indeed were saints in the one new man during the transitional period of the first century, but there are not saints in the body of Christ today.

The Meaning of “Saint”

By “saints,” I am not referring to all believers in the present age. My position is that New Testament “saints” are first-century Jewish believers who were part of Israel’s believing remnant, the “little flock,” being offered the kingdom. They are those set

apart in relation to the kingdom promises, not simply all who are saved by grace through faith in this dispensation.

This is distinct from the common evangelical view that “saint” is simply the positional title of any believer in Christ today. I do not believe that standard use can be consistently grounded in the biblical text.

Saints and the One New Man

In the early years of Paul’s ministry, there was an overlap between the kingdom program for Israel and the newly revealed body of Christ. Jewish believers who were saints in the kingdom sense could also become members of the one new man.

They did not enter the one new man by circumcision, baptism, repentance, or any other requirement of the kingdom gospel, but by the same grace-through-faith gospel that defines the body of Christ. When they believed that gospel, they came into the new man. However, I do not believe they thereby forfeited their kingdom promises and covenant blessings; for a short transitional period they effectively lived on a dual track—remaining objects

of kingdom promises while also being members of the new man.

The “one new man” abolishes the distinction of Jew and Gentile in terms of position in Christ, but it does not retroactively erase Israel’s covenants or the kingdom offer that had been extended to that first-century remnant.

No Saints in the New Man Today

In the present day, there is no active kingdom offer to Israel. The kingdom offer was withdrawn, and God will in the future raise up a new remnant of Israel, distinct from the body of Christ. Because “saint” in the New Testament sense refers to those in that kingdom-remnant context, there are no saints in the one new man today.

Even a Jewish believer today who trusts Christ and enters the body of Christ is not a saint in that technical, scriptural sense, because he or she is not being offered the kingdom and is not living under that specific covenantal arrangement. Such a believer is saved by grace through faith and is a member of the body of Christ, but not biblically a “saint” as that term is used for the first-century remnant.

Ephesians and the Usage of “Saints”

In Ephesus there were saints in the first-century sense. Ephesians 1:1 says:

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.”

Note the distinction: “to the saints . . . and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.” If “saints” simply meant “all believers,” there would be no need to add “and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.” The conjunction “and” naturally suggests two groups: the saints (kingdom-remnant Jews) and the faithful in Christ Jesus (those in the new man, including Gentiles). The saints of Ephesus, as first-century kingdom believers, could be simultaneously part of the one new man while still being saints in relation to the kingdom offer.

Testing the Definition of “Saint”

A helpful exercise is to examine every New Testament occurrence of “saint(s)” and ask whether it more naturally fits all believers of all times, or specifically first-century Jewish believers in the kingdom program. Start with the easiest contexts—for example, collections taken “for the saints”—where the beneficiaries are clearly identifiable as the Jewish remnant in need. Use those clear passages as your default definition and then test the more ambiguous texts against that.

On that basis, I understand “saints” as belonging to the first-century kingdom remnant, some of whom also entered the one new man during the overlap period. Today, however, in the ongoing body of Christ on earth, there are no saints in that technical, biblical sense, because the kingdom offer is not presently on the table.

38 Gentiles and the Identity of the Church of God

Question

Were there any Gentiles in the church of God? Does 1 Corinthians 12:2 refer to Gentiles or to Jews who had lived like Gentiles?

September 24, 2026

Answer

1 Corinthians 12:2 says:

“Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.”

The question has two parts: whether Gentiles belonged to the “church of God,” and whether the “ye” in this verse refers to actual Gentiles or to Jews who had lived in a Gentile-like way.

Defining the Church of God

We should distinguish between the “church of God” and the “body of Christ.” I understand the “church of God” in the New Testament to be primarily the assembly of believing Jews—the kingdom remnant—rather than a simple synonym for the body of Christ.

Consider several occurrences of “church of God”:

- 1 Corinthians 1:2:

“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to

be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”

Here “church of God . . . called saints” aligns with the Jewish remnant. The phrase “both theirs and ours” suggests two related, but distinguishable, groups.

- 1 Corinthians 10:32:

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.”

Three groups appear: Jews, Gentiles, and the church of God. This naturally fits Jews who are unbelievers, Gentiles who are unbelievers, and believing Jews (church of God).

- 1 Corinthians 15:9:

“For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

Paul persecuted the church of God before the revelation of the mystery

and before the body of Christ began. The entity he persecuted must therefore be the Jewish believing community—the kingdom assembly—not the later one new man.

- Galatians 1:13:

“For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it.”

Again, this persecution predates the revelation of the body of Christ and locates the church of God within the sphere of the Jews’ religion, confirming its Jewish character.

These clear passages establish a default: “church of God” refers to the Jewish believing assembly associated with the kingdom program. Passages such as 1 Timothy 3:5 (“how shall he take care of the church of God?”) may be applied by extension to the body of Christ in terms of practical instruction, but the core referent of the phrase is Jewish.

On that basis, I would answer: there were not Gentiles in the church of God as such; the church of God is best understood as the Jewish remnant-church.

Gentiles and the Body of Christ at Corinth

Corinth clearly had both Jews and Gentiles present in the broader sphere of believers.

Acts 18 describes Paul at Corinth:

“And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and

persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. . . . And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.” (Acts 18:4,7-8)

Justice appears to be a Gentile (or at least a proselyte) who worshiped Israel’s God. Crispus is the Jewish chief ruler of the synagogue. Many Corinthians believed and were baptized, indicating a mixed group. Within that mix, the “church of God” language focuses on the believing Jewish component (saints), while the wider body of Christ at Corinth included Gentile believers as well.

“Ye Were Gentiles” in 1 Corinthians 12:2

Returning to 1 Corinthians 12:2:

“Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.”

The description “carried away unto these dumb idols” fits straightforwardly with actual Gentiles who had practiced idolatry. While an individual Jew could certainly fall into idolatry, the language

here resonates naturally with those whose former religious identity was pagan. It is strained to treat this as Jews who merely “lived like Gentiles.”

Therefore, I take the “ye” of 1 Corinthians 12:2 to refer to genuine Gentiles (uncircumcised, formerly pagan) who had come to faith and were now part of the body of Christ. They were not, however, “church of God” in the technical sense I have described; they were members of the one new man, the body of Christ, alongside Jewish believers.

Summary of the Relationship

- The “church of God” in the New Testament is best identified with the Jewish believing remnant—the kingdom assembly.

- The body of Christ, the one new man, includes both Jews and Gentiles, united in a new entity not defined by Israel’s covenants.
- At Corinth there were both saints (Jewish kingdom believers) and Gentile believers. The saints constitute the church of God; Gentile believers belong to the body of Christ but not to the church of God in that technical sense.
- 1 Corinthians 12:2 speaks of real Gentiles, formerly idolatrous, now in Christ, not Jews who had merely adopted Gentile habits.

On that basis: there were no Gentiles in the church of God as such; Gentiles were in the body of Christ, and the “ye were Gentiles” of 1 Corinthians 12:2 refers to those Gentile believers.



39 The Purpose and Ministry of the Body of Christ

Question

What is the purpose of the body of Christ?

September 24, 2026

Answer

The body of Christ is the “one new man” of Ephesians 2:15, formed out of both Jews and Gentiles and not identical with Israel. It is not enlarged Israel, not a substitute for Israel, and not Gentiles grafted into Israel. It is a new entity, composed of individuals who receive the gift of eternal life by grace through faith in the gospel revealed to Paul, with Christ as the head and believers as members of his body.

The question is whether Scripture gives a specific purpose statement for this body.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

The clearest purpose-related passage is 2 Corinthians 5:18-20:

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

Here we see:

- God has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ.
- He has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.
- He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.
- We are ambassadors for Christ, appealing to others to be reconciled to God.

Assuming that the “us” here appropriately includes members of the body of Christ (and not merely Paul and his immediate companions), this passage functions as a purpose statement: the body of Christ is entrusted with the ministry and word of reconciliation and serves as Christ’s ambassadors in the world, proclaiming that reconciliation is available.

Other Passages Often Cited

Other texts are sometimes used as purpose summaries, but they must be handled carefully.

- The so-called “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:19-20) is commonly treated as the church’s purpose statement: evangelism, discipling, baptizing, and teaching. However, that commission was given to the apostles in the context of Israel’s kingdom program and is not presented in Scripture as the charter of the body of Christ.
- Ephesians 2:10 (“we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works”) is often cited. Yet the shift from “ye” in verse 8 to “we” in verse 10 suggests a change of referent, and in Ephesians the

“we” consistently aligns with the Jewish remnant, not the broader body of Christ.

- Ephesians 3:8-11 describes Paul’s particular commission “to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery” and indicates that through the church the manifold wisdom of God is made known to heavenly principalities and powers. While this directly states Paul’s mission, it also reflects what the body of Christ displays: the revelation of the mystery and the demonstration of God’s manifold wisdom. This harmonizes with, and is encompassed by, the ministry of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5.

Taken together, the body of Christ proclaims the previously hidden mystery gospel and the reconciliation now available to all.

Avoiding Over-Systematization

There is a danger in forcing a single, narrow “purpose statement” on the body of Christ as if it were a modern corporation. When we do this, we risk excluding many legitimate aspects of Christian life and ministry that are not easily subsumed under that one phrase.

If we said, for example, “the sole purpose of the body of Christ is to proclaim reconciliation,” we might be tempted to downplay or neglect mutual edification, worship, prayer, fellowship, service to one another, and countless expressions of life

together that Scripture assumes and commends.

It may be better to see the ministry of reconciliation as a central entrusted task, while recognizing that the body of Christ also exists simply to be Christ’s life on earth: believers joined to their head, walking together, building one another up, and manifesting the reality of that union in many ways.

A Balanced Statement

In light of the passages considered:

- The body of Christ is the one new man in which believing Jews and Gentiles are united in Christ.
- Its central entrusted task is the ministry and word of reconciliation, functioning as Christ’s ambassadors to the world (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).
- Through this body, the fellowship of the mystery and the manifold wisdom of God are made known (Ephesians 3:8-11).
- At the same time, the body of Christ lives out its identity in worship, mutual edification, service, and shared life, as those joined to their head and to one another.

So the purpose of the body of Christ can be summarized as bearing and proclaiming the message of reconciliation revealed in the mystery, while embodying the life of Christ together as his corporate body in the present age.

40 Contrasting Free Grace Theology and Lordship Salvation

Question

What are your thoughts on free grace theology, especially in contrast to lordship salvation?

September 25, 2026

Answer

I hold a free grace position and reject lordship salvation. I believe Paul clearly teaches that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works, and that neither pre-conversion works nor post-conversion performance are conditions for receiving or retaining salvation.

Lordship salvation in practice makes works, surrender, reform, or perseverance necessary either as conditions of salvation or as necessary proofs that salvation was genuine. Even when it is said that works are not required to be saved, the assertion that their absence proves one was “never saved” effectively makes those works part of the saving equation.

The Nature of Free Grace

Free grace holds that:

- Salvation is received by grace through faith alone, apart from works of any kind.
- There is no additional theological or moral test one must pass to receive the gift.

- There is no requirement to “make Jesus Lord of all” as a condition of receiving eternal life.
- Perseverance, reform, surrender, and a transformed life are desirable and proper, but not conditions for justification.

A believer may fail badly and repeatedly, yet still possess eternal life and be complete in Christ. Lack of discipline or serious sin may bring severe temporal consequences and the Lord’s discipline, but it does not reverse or disprove justification.

The Problem with Lordship Salvation

Lordship teaching often says, in various forms, that if a person does not persevere or does not show sufficient reform, this proves they were never saved. That logic means:

- Perseverance and reform are functionally required for salvation.
- One must, in effect, endure to the end and demonstrate particular fruits to validate one’s faith.

You can change where you place these elements in the “equation,” but if you insist they must be present or salvation was never real, you have tied salvation to works.

Lordship advocates typically appeal to passages from the earthly ministry of Jesus, which, taken in isolation, sound like strong support for their view. However, Paul writes that Jesus was “a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers” Rom 15:8. He was born under the law, lived under the law, and spoke in the context of Israel’s covenant program.

When we rightly divide law and grace, prophecy and mystery, Israel and the body of Christ, we recognize that the terms and conditions Jesus announced to Israel under the law are not the same as the free gift of justification described in Paul’s mystery revelation.

After Salvation Versus the Way of Salvation

There is much to say about what should happen after one is saved—growth, sanctification, obedience, service. Those are important topics. But “what should happen after salvation” is not “how a person is saved.” Free grace insists on that distinction. Lordship salvation tends to blur or erase it.

In Christ, the believer is perfectly saved and complete. That completeness is part of the salvation package, not a later achievement. Discipline, heartbreak, or moral failure do not undo justification.

On the Free Grace Movement

Although I agree doctrinally with free grace soteriology, I do not formally associate with the organized free grace movement.

There are two main reasons:

1. Independence from movements.

When one ties ministry and speaking opportunities to a movement, there is subtle pressure to stay quiet when one disagrees or when one’s theology changes. I prefer to remain independent, so I can state my views freely without regard to whether I will be invited to particular conferences.

2. Lack of consistent right division.

Many free grace proponents teach Paul’s salvation message clearly, but often do not ground it in a robust doctrine of right division that consistently separates prophecy from mystery and Israel from the body of Christ. As soon as they move from soteriology to areas like ecclesiology, Christology, or eschatology, their lack of a clear dispensational framework tends to produce inconsistency and confusion.

In that sense, lordship salvation systems, being rooted in covenant theology, are more “internally consistent,” though consistently wrong regarding the gospel of grace. Free grace, without a solid dispensational foundation, often lets soteriology become the tail that wags the entire theological dog.

Free grace and dispensationalism are, in my view, intricately linked. When one rightly divides Scripture and recognizes

Paul's unique mystery revelation, the free grace position follows naturally.



41 Evaluating Biblical Covenantalism and New Covenant Theology

Question

Are you familiar with Paul Henebury who goes by Dr. Reluctant and his system called biblical covenantalism? What are your thoughts on his teaching?

September 25, 2026

Answer

I am somewhat familiar with Paul Henebury ("Dr. Reluctant") and his proposal of "biblical covenantalism." My knowledge is broad rather than detailed, but sufficient to outline where I agree and where I differ.

Biblical covenantalism is not traditional Reformed covenant theology. It is an attempt to rebuild a kind of dispensational system around the explicit biblical covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic/priestly, Davidic, New) rather than around the unstated theological covenants (works, grace, redemption) of classic covenant theology. In that, it seeks to

take the text of Scripture more seriously and literally.

Areas of Agreement

From what I understand, I appreciate several elements of Henebury's approach:

- He focuses on covenants that are actually stated in Scripture, not speculative covenants.
- He employs a literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic, as dispensationalists do.
- He affirms a future for national, ethnic Israel.
- He recognizes that the church was a mystery in some sense and not simply the continuation of Israel.

- He insists that God's covenants bind Him to fulfill His oaths as spoken, which fits with a literal interpretation and a future fulfillment of Israel's covenants.

These are important and commendable emphases, and much of his five-sentence summary of biblical covenantalism is language that many dispensationalists could affirm.

The Central Point of Disagreement

The core difference lies in how he relates the church to the New Covenant and to the broader covenant structure.

Henebury, as I understand him, effectively:

- Places the church under the New Covenant.
- Sees Acts 2 as the point at which the "mystery" reality surfaces or is substantially revealed.
- Treats the development of the church as a kind of morphing from Israel's covenant program, yet still reserves some future fulfillment of Israel's covenants.

This framework blurs the sharp distinction between Israel's covenants and the mystery body of Christ. If you start the mystery church in Acts 2 and place it under the New Covenant, you inevitably end up with a form of replacement theology, even if you deny the label. You have, in practice, placed the present church inside an Israelitish covenant that Jeremiah explicitly assigns to "the house of Israel, and . . . the house of Judah" Jer 31:31.

By contrast, I hold that:

- The New Covenant is promised to Israel and Judah, not to the mystery body.
- The Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants belong to Israel's prophetic program and will be fulfilled literally for that nation.
- The body of Christ is a "new man," a mystery hidden in God and not revealed in any of the covenants.

Therefore, I do not believe the church today is under any covenant. We are under a mystery administration revealed uniquely to Paul, not under the covenants promised to Israel.

On His Five Foundational Points

Henebury summarizes biblical covenantalism in five points (as he has written). Briefly:

1. **Covenants are defined by their oaths.** I agree that a covenant's meaning is anchored in its explicit oath language.
2. **God is bound by His covenants.** Unilaterally sworn divine oaths must come to pass precisely as spoken. Again, that is standard literal hermeneutics and fully compatible with dispensationalism.
3. **Covenants address major aspects of God's "creation project," and nothing else in Scripture can contradict them.** Insofar as this affirms that later revelation does not overturn explicit covenant promises, I agree. The New Covenant to Israel, for example, cannot be "re-

signified” so as to erase its national, Israelitish character.

4. **Covenants are primarily hermeneutical.** He uses covenants as his main lens for structuring the Bible’s storyline. I agree that covenants are key to understanding prophetic Scripture, but I insist there is also a mystery program not defined by those covenants.

5. **The major covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, priestly/Mosaic, Davidic) are unconditional and implemented on the basis of Christ’s mission as the New Covenant Lamb.** Here is the pivotal issue: he anchors the realization of all these covenants in Christ as the New Covenant Lamb and then relates that directly to the church’s identity. This leads naturally to placing the church under the New Covenant and thus into Israel’s covenantal orbit.

The wording of these points is broad enough that many differing traditions—Catholic, Presbyterian, free grace dispensational, and others—could affirm them while meaning different things by them. The key disagreement is not the statements themselves, but what is built upon them, especially regarding the New Covenant and the timing and nature of the mystery.

Covenants and the Mystery

My concern is this: if the biblical covenants are made the controlling frame-

work for all interpretation, the uniqueness of the mystery revealed to Paul is diminished or lost. That mystery, by definition, was “hid in God” and “not made known” in former ages. It is not an extension of, or participant in, Israel’s covenants.

If you insist that everything must fit under the covenants, you must, sooner or later, put the church into one of them—almost always the New Covenant. At that point, you have effectively skipped over the mystery character of the body of Christ and absorbed the church into Israel’s covenantal structure.

So, I would say:

- Build your understanding of prophecy, Israel, kingdom, land, and future restoration around the covenants.
- But keep the mystery program distinct, recognizing that it is not grounded in, or carried by, any of the biblical covenants.

That is where I part ways with biblical covenantalism as Henebury presents it.

Overall Assessment

Henebury is a dispensational premillennialist and a “reluctant dispensationalist” by his own description. He seeks to honor the text of the covenants and uphold a future for Israel while also integrating the church into a Christ-centered covenantal framework. I appreciate much in his method and many of his stated commitments.

However, by placing the church under the New Covenant and effectively rooting the present age in the covenant structure rather than in the mystery, his system, in

my view, does not maintain a sufficiently sharp Israel–church distinction and tends to undercut right division at crucial points.

On those grounds, I cannot adopt biblical covenantalism as my framework, even

while acknowledging areas of common ground and appreciating his desire to read the covenants literally.



42 Using Online Tools for Passage Interpretation and Study

Question

Where on your ministry website can I find help in interpreting a passage of scripture? Can you give us an example?

September 25, 2026

Answer

There are several tools and sites connected with my ministry that can help you interpret a passage. They serve different purposes: finding what I have taught, generating study outlines, running word searches, and doing language work. I will walk through the main ones and illustrate with John 3:16.

1. RandyWhiteMinistries.org: Search and Passage Analysis

Finding prior teaching

At RandyWhiteMinistries.org, use the search bar (“Search verses or topics”). For example, type John 3:16. The results will show:

- Specific sermons or Q&A sessions where John 3:16 is addressed.
- Series messages (e.g., a larger section like John 3:11–18) that include the verse.

Clicking a result typically gives you a video and, where available, written notes. This is helpful if you want to see how I handled the passage, but it is not the same as doing your own exegesis.

Passage Analysis Studio

Under “Bible Study Tools” you will find the “Passage Analysis Studio.” This is designed to help you study a passage for yourself.

Enter a reference (e.g., *John 3:16*) and then choose among several modules:

Text comparison Compares the KJV with modern translations (NASB, NIV, ESV) to see if there are significant textual or lexical differences. If none appear, you can be reasonably confident there is no major textual issue at that verse.

Cross references The tool divides the verse into clauses and supplies cross references for each. For example, for “whosoever believeth in him should not perish,” it will list passages such as:

John 11:26 Acts 10:43

These show how the same idea appears elsewhere and help you trace theological themes and interpretive patterns.

Questions to ask This module gives basic interpretive questions to stimulate observation and reflection, such as:

- What does “world” refer to here?
- What is meant by “everlasting life”?

Though simple, these questions help you slow down and notice issues you might otherwise pass over.

Text-based outline For a single verse, this is somewhat limited, but it attempts to structure the thought of the verse into logical components. For longer passages it becomes more useful.

Cascading outline for longer sections

If you enter a range, say *John 3:1–20*, and select “Cascading outline,” the tool will generate an outline of the passage based purely on the grammar and flow:

- Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night.
- Jesus teaches about being born again.
- Jesus speaks of the Son of man being lifted up.
- God’s love and sending His Son for salvation and condemnation.

You can click on any section (such as *John 3:3–8*) to get a more detailed sub-outline. You can then select elements and export them as simple text, which is useful for study notes or teaching outlines.

Word and phrase search

In the Passage Analysis Studio, the “King James word or phrase search” lets you search for words or phrases across the KJV. You can:

- Search for exact phrases.
- Use a “fuzzy search” to find approximate matches.
- View results in aligned context (a few words on either side), which quickly shows usage patterns.

This is helpful if you want to see, for example, where phrases like “only begotten son” or “everlasting life” occur elsewhere, and how they are used.

Language tools

The language tools section lets you click on an English word and see the underlying Greek word and morphology. You can then search for:

- All instances of that Greek lemma across Scripture.
- All instances of that lemma with the same morphology.
- Any word with a given morphology (for broader grammatical studies).

This is useful when, for instance, you wish to understand how a particular Greek term for “world” or “believe” is used in different contexts.

2. StudyYourBible.org: Catalog of Bible Studies

StudyYourBible.org indexes our verse-by-verse and topical studies. You can:

- Enter a reference like John 3 or John 3:16.
- See which series and sessions cover that passage (e.g., Gospel of John series, Hebrews series where the verse is cited).
- Download PDFs of notes and, where available, audio or video.

This site is particularly helpful if you want structured, sequential teaching on a book and to see how a given verse fits within that series.

3. AskTheTheologian.com: Answer Archive

At AskTheTheologian.com, the “Search the answers” function lets you query past Q&A responses.

You can search by:

- Scripture reference (e.g., “John 3:16”).
- Question-style phrasing (e.g., “What does John 3:16 mean?”).
- Topical phrases (e.g., “job of a preacher”).

Results are ranked by match strength (strong, medium, related). Each result points to a specific Q&A in which I addressed that passage or topic. This is helpful for seeing concise, focused treatments of interpretive questions that have arisen.

4. Biblify.org: Interactive Study Environment

Biblify.org is a Bible-reading and study platform built by Nathan White. It interacts with several study features:

Navigation and highlighting

You can type a reference directly (e.g., “John 3:16”) and the text will appear. You can:

- Highlight verses or phrases (privately or publicly).
- Attach notes.
- Add verses to a passage list for a study or sermon.

Phrase and word search

Highlight a phrase such as “only begotten Son” and choose “Search phrase.” Biblify will list every occurrence of that phrase (and, with similarity options, closely related phrases) in Scripture, allowing you to see all usages quickly.

You can also use the general word search tool from the top menu to search any word or phrase and see occurrences throughout the Bible.

Strong’s and original-language tools

The “Strong’s” feature overlays Strong’s numbers on the text. Clicking a word shows:

- The Greek or Hebrew lemma.
- All occurrences of that lemma in Scripture.
- Distribution of occurrences by book, with the ability to filter (e.g., only occurrences in Jude).

This is particularly useful for word studies: for example, studying the word behind “whosoever” or “world” and seeing contexts beyond your initial passage.

Graphics and presentation

For those teaching, Biblify can generate verse graphics for display, with adjustable colors and a separate “output” window. As you change verses on your study screen, the output window updates, which is convenient for projecting verses during teaching.

Putting It Together for Interpretation

Using John 3:16 as an example, here is how you might proceed:

1. **Read the verse in context** (e.g., John 3:1–21) in Biblify or on paper.
2. **Generate a cascading outline** of John 3:1–21 in the Passage Analysis Studio, to see the structure of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus and how verse 16 fits.
3. **Use cross references** for each clause of John 3:16 to locate supporting or parallel passages.
4. **Consult the “Questions to ask”** module to ensure you have probed key issues (e.g., “world,” “whosoever,” “everlasting life”).
5. **Run word or phrase searches** (via Passage Analysis Studio or Biblify) on key terms to see their broader usage.
6. **Use the language tools** to confirm the underlying Greek words and their usage.
7. **Optionally, check my prior teaching** on John 3:16 at RandyWhiteMinistries.org or StudyYourBible.org, or see if there are relevant Q&A sessions at AskTheTheologian.com.

These tools are all available at no cost and are designed to make careful, contextual, and linguistic study more accessible, whether you are preparing to teach or simply deepening your own understanding of the text.

43 Jewish and Gentile Audiences in First Corinthians

Question

Will you explain 1 Corinthians 1 verses 1 and 2?

September 28, 2026

Answer

Paul opens 1 Corinthians by identifying himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God and by mentioning Sosthenes, his brother. Paul gives a brief defense of his apostleship, indicating that his authority is not self-assumed but grounded in God's will. Sosthenes is included as a companion and co-laborer who stands with Paul and sends greetings, even if we know little else about him. Paul often extends this kind of courtesy, recognizing those present with him as sharing in the work and, in a practical sense, the letter.

The more complex issues arise in verse 2: "unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

The "church of God" at Corinth

The phrase "church of God" strongly suggests a Jewish context, or at least a group with a strong Jewish core. Several features of the Corinthian correspondence point in this direction:

- In Acts, the ministry at Corinth is rooted in the synagogue. There are conflicts in the synagogue, they move next door to a place associated with the synagogue, and the chief ruler of the synagogue is converted. This gives the Corinthian assembly a heavily Jewish background.
- Paul is ministering in a period when Israel is still being offered the kingdom. That implies a need to address "kingdom" matters, which are tied to Israel, not the later, fully revealed body of Christ.

"Church of God" language fits that setting. While I would not insist dogmatically that every use of "church of God" is exclusively the little flock, I lean toward understanding it as at least predominantly Jewish and closely connected with Israel's kingdom program.

Sanctified and called saints

Paul describes this "church of God which is at Corinth" as those "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints."

The word "sanctified" is related to the same root as "holy" and "saints" (from *hagios*). It carries the idea of being set

apart for a particular, exclusive use. When Scripture interprets Scripture, sanctification language often relates to Israel as the people set aside for God's specific purpose.

Similarly, the language of "calling" frequently attaches to Israel. Israel is the "called" nation in a particular way. The King James text has "called to be saints," but "to be" is in italics, indicating it is supplied by the translators. Literally, it reads "called saints"—not invited to become saints, but designated as saints, the holy ones.

In Scripture, who are "the holy people"? Phrased that way, it strongly points again to Israel: a holy nation, a kingdom of priests, a chosen generation. Thus "sanctified" and "called saints" resonate with Israel's identity.

Two groups indicated by "both"

After describing the church of God at Corinth as sanctified and called saints, Paul adds: "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

The word "both" is crucial. It implies two distinguishable groups:

1. The church of God at Corinth: sanctified in Christ Jesus and called saints (language that aligns closely with Israel).
2. All who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord: believers more broadly, not limited to that Jewish-rooted assembly.

This opening, therefore, anticipates a mixed audience in the letter. There is a primary, heavily Jewish assembly ("church of God. . . sanctified. . . called saints") together with a wider circle of believers who call on the Lord Jesus.

Evidence of a strong Jewish component in Corinth

Several passages within 1 Corinthians confirm a significant Jewish element:

- 1 Corinthians 10:1: "all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea." The natural reading aligns the audience with the Exodus generation—"our fathers" being the patriarchs and the nation under Moses.
- 1 Corinthians 5:1: Paul contrasts their sins with what is "not so much as named among the Gentiles," implying that "Gentiles" are viewed as an outside reference group, not the primary identity of his readers.
- 1 Corinthians 7:18: "Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised." Some in the congregation are clearly circumcised Jews, again confirming a Jewish presence.
- 1 Corinthians 10:18: "Behold Israel after the flesh." Paul directly addresses and assumes familiarity with Israel's sacrificial system and law.
- 1 Corinthians 14:21: "In the law it is written. . ." followed by a quotation from Isaiah. Israel's Scriptures are treated as authoritative and familiar, indicating readers for whom the law and prophets are central.

- 1 Corinthians 15:3–4: “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures...rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” This likely looks back to Israel’s Scriptures and presumes their weight and relevance.
- 1 Corinthians 1:12: “I am of Paul...of Apollos...of Cephas...of Christ.” The reference to Cephas (Peter) points to an ongoing awareness of the Jerusalem/apostolic Jewish leadership.

In addition, kingdom-oriented passages in the letter fit naturally with a Jewish kingdom hope rooted in Israel’s promises.

Evidence of Gentiles in the Corinthian assembly

At the same time, there are clear signs of a Gentile component:

- 1 Corinthians 12:2: “Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols.” This directly recalls a Gentile, idolatrous background for at least part of the congregation.
- 1 Corinthians 12:13: “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles.” This acknowledges Jews and Gentiles together in one body in that assembly.
- 1 Corinthians 1:22–23: “the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ

crucified. . .” Paul consciously addresses both Jews and Greeks.

- 1 Corinthians 8: The discussion about meat offered to idols presumes familiarity with pagan temples and sacrifices—indicative of a Gentile environment and experience.

The safest conclusion, therefore, is that Corinth is a mixed congregation: a Jewish-rooted “church of God” that is sanctified and called saints, together with Gentiles and others “in every place” who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

Summary of 1 Corinthians 1:1–2

In 1 Corinthians 1:1–2 Paul:

- Identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God and acknowledges Sosthenes as his brother and companion.
- Addresses a “church of God” at Corinth whose description (sanctified, called saints) aligns closely with Israel’s sanctified, holy identity.
- Includes within his address all who everywhere call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, marking out a broader body of believers.
- Signals, by the term “both,” two distinguishable but related groups: a Jewish-centered church of God and all other believers.

Understanding this dual audience helps explain why 1 Corinthians contains both heavily Jewish elements and clear teaching relevant to Gentile believers.

44 Assessing Local Church Health Beyond Numerical Growth

Question

If butts in seats, money, and baptism were not measuring stakes of the church, how do you measure a healthy church? If attendance, money, and baptism tools are not the proper measurements, how should we measure the health of a local church?

September 28, 2026

Answer

Attendance figures, financial totals, and baptism counts are commonly used because they are visible and appear quantifiable. Yet they are easily manipulated and often misleading as indicators of spiritual health.

Attendance can be counted in many different ways. One can decide whether to count only Sunday morning worship, or also midweek services, youth groups, and other activities. By changing the counting method or by loading the calendar with special events, attendance can be inflated without any real growth in spiritual depth.

Money, though harder to manipulate than raw headcounts, can still be affected by campaigns, emotional appeals, or local economic conditions. A church may appear “strong” financially while being shallow in doctrine and weak in discipleship.

Baptism numbers can be driven up through special programs, pressure tac-

tics, or repeated re-baptisms, without any necessary correlation to lasting faith, understanding, or growth.

All three metrics, even when honestly reported, are shaped by factors such as population growth or decline in the surrounding community, cultural trends, and social prestige. Therefore, they are poor primary measurements of church health.

Do we need to measure church health in numbers?

There is a deeper question: must the health of a church be quantified at all, in the sense of producing numerical scores and graphs? In medicine, numerical indicators (like lab values) are used, but they frequently do not capture whether a person is truly well in terms of day-to-day function and quality of life. Metrics can become ends in themselves, driving unnecessary interventions.

Similarly, in church life, the pursuit of numerical “health indicators” can become an obsession that distracts from actual health. External numbers can be within “target range” while the congregation is spiritually shallow, divided, or doctrinally adrift.

Qualitative marks of a healthy local church

A healthier approach is to look at qualitative, biblically informed traits, even if they cannot be neatly reduced to spreadsheets:

- **Centrality of the word of God.** Is Scripture being taught carefully, contextually, and consistently? Is there a serious effort to understand and expound the text, not merely to use verses as decoration for human ideas?
- **Understanding of right division.** Do the people learn how to handle the Bible—distinguishing Israel and the body of Christ, law and grace, prophecy and mystery? Are they being equipped to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15)?
- **Doctrinal clarity.** Does the congregation know what it believes and why? Is there a shared understanding of core doctrines, and can members articulate them?
- **Edification and mutual care.** Are believers being built up? Ephesians 4:11–16 and 1 Corinthians 14:26 emphasize edification—the strengthening of the saints so that they are not tossed about by every wind of doctrine. Do members encourage and support one another?
- **Stability and resilience.** Is the congregation less vulnerable to the-

ological fads and spiritual novel-
ties? Are people grounded enough
to resist error?

- **Loving fellowship.** Do members genuinely love one another, or is the church driven by status, image, and factions?
- **Ability to function without overdependence on one person-ality.** A healthy body should be able to function if a key leader is absent. Excessive reliance on a single figure, or on a distant denominational structure, is a warning sign.

These marks are discerned over time by observation, conversation, and life together rather than by annual statistical reports.

The role of personal and congregational discernment

In both physical and spiritual health, those who live in the situation usually know when something is wrong. Church members generally sense when a congregation is spiritually unhealthy—marked by persistent conflict, doctrinal confusion, neglect of Scripture, or coldness in fellowship.

Instead of striving to meet externally imposed numerical standards, a congregation is better served by asking sober questions such as: Are we growing in our understanding of God’s word? Are we more able to handle Scripture accurately than we were several years ago? Are we walking in love and truth? These are not easily charted on a denominational form, but they are more faithful to the biblical picture of a healthy church.

45 Measuring Church Growth by Learning and Edification

Question

Should church growth be measured by how well the congregation learns and applies scripture rather than numbers which can deceive?

September 28, 2026

Answer

If numbers can deceive—and they can—then the more appropriate focus is on growth in understanding, stability, and obedience to the word of God. The difficulty is that such growth does not lend itself easily to simple metrics. Yet Scripture emphasizes precisely this kind of growth.

Biblical emphasis on edification and knowledge

Ephesians 4:11–13 describes gifted leaders given “for the perfecting of the saints. . . for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” The goal is maturity, stability, and unity in truth, not bare numerical increase.

1 Corinthians 14:26 concludes, “Let all things be done unto edifying.” The gatherings of believers are to be structured around building up the body.

Colossians 1:9–10 records Paul’s prayer “that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and

spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord. . . being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Here, knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding are linked to a worthy walk and fruitfulness.

2 Timothy 2:15 urges the believer to “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” A congregation growing in its ability to study and rightly divide Scripture is experiencing real growth.

Practical indicators of learning-based growth

While hard to quantify, several questions help discern whether a church is truly growing:

- Do members understand the flow of Scripture better than they did in previous years?
- Can they distinguish between God’s program for Israel and for the body of Christ?

- Are they less susceptible to theological trends and sensationalism?
- Can they explain their beliefs from Scripture rather than merely repeating formulas?
- Do they apply a biblical worldview to decisions about work, family, civic life, and relationships?

Growth in such areas points to genuine edification, even if the numerical size of the congregation remains small or stable.

Edification over external expansion

Edification is primarily discerned through long-term observation rather than quick

measurements. A congregation that slowly, steadily deepens its understanding of Scripture and its capacity to live it out is experiencing a more meaningful kind of “growth” than one that rapidly expands in size without doctrinal stability.

Thus, church growth is best understood as growth in knowledge, discernment, and Christlike conduct grounded in rightly divided Scripture. Numbers may or may not accompany that growth, but they are not the true measure of it.



46 Christ’s Rule, the Saints, and Sacrifices in the Millennium

Question

Will Jesus rule directly over the Gentile nations during his thousand-year reign? Will the saints co-govern and judge the nations especially regarding how those nations treated them during the great tribulation? Could millennial sacrifices atone for sins committed by saints who remain in mortal bodies and by their descendants?

September 28, 2026

Answer

The questions concern the nature of Christ's rule in the millennium, the role of the saints, and the function of millennial sacrifices.

Christ's rule over the nations

Revelation presents Jesus as "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16; cf. Revelation 17:14). This title indicates universal sovereignty over all earthly rulers. Psalm 72, a messianic psalm, says:

"He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him."

Here, Messiah's dominion is global, yet there are still "kings" who bring tribute. His rule is direct in the sense of supreme authority and control, but it appears mediated through subordinate rulers.

Isaiah 60 likewise pictures Gentiles and their kings coming to Israel's light (Isaiah 60:3–4), and Daniel 7:13–14 speaks of the Son of man receiving "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that

all people, nations, and languages, should serve him." He possesses an everlasting kingdom, but the text allows for ongoing national structures under his supremacy.

It is therefore reasonable to say that Jesus rules all nations as sovereign King, while ordinary governmental administration among the Gentiles is carried out through lesser rulers under his authority.

The saints co-governing and judging the nations

Daniel 7 emphasizes the role of the "saints of the most High":

"But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever" (Daniel 7:18).

"Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" (Daniel 7:22).

"And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Daniel 7:27).

These passages show that the saints—particularly Israel’s faithful—receive and possess the kingdom, and that “judgment was given” to them. This implies a role in ruling and adjudicating, including in relation to the nations that opposed them.

Other texts point in the same direction. The apostles are promised thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The connection between judgment of the nations and their treatment of Israel during the tribulation fits with the principle expressed elsewhere: what is done to Messiah’s brethren is reckoned as done to him.

Thus, during the millennium, the saints do indeed co-govern under Christ and exercise judgment, especially in connection with how nations treated them in the time of tribulation.

The function of millennial sacrifices

Ezekiel 40–48 describes in detail a future temple and sacrificial system in a context that best fits the millennial kingdom. These sacrifices are not presented as mere memorials, but as having real ritual efficacy.

Ezekiel 43:18–27 gives ordinances for the altar:

“These are the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon. And thou shalt give to the priests the Levites that be of the seed of Zadok. . . a young bullock

for a sin offering. . . Thus shalt thou cleanse and purge it. . . On the second day thou shalt offer a kid of the goats without blemish for a sin offering. . . Seven days shalt thou prepare every day a goat for a sin offering. . . When these days are expired, it shall be, that upon the eighth day, and so forward, the priests shall make your burnt offerings upon the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you, saith the Lord God.”

The language of cleansing, purging, and God’s explicit statement “I will accept you” tie acceptance to the offerings.

Ezekiel 45:17–20 adds:

“And it shall be the prince’s part to give burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and drink offerings, in the feasts, and in the new moons, and in the sabbaths, in all solemnities of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meat offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make reconciliation for the house of Israel. . . So shall ye reconcile the house.”

Here sacrifices are said “to make reconciliation for the house of Israel” and “to reconcile the house.” This indicates that,

in the millennial context, animal sacrifices perform a God-ordained ritual function related to cleansing and reconciliation for Israel in the flesh.

These passages cannot be reduced to mere symbolic memorials without doing violence to the explicit terms “sin offering,” “cleanse,” “purge,” “reconcile,” and “I will accept you.” The better conclusion is that in the millennial kingdom, with Israel restored and living under the new covenant promises in a renewed temple system, sacrifices function in relation to ritual purification and reconciliation for Israel as a nation living in mortal bodies.

Relation to sins of mortals and their descendants

During the millennium, there will be mortals—Israelites and Gentiles—who live, marry, and have descendants. Though

Satan is bound and righteousness characterizes the kingdom, sin has not been entirely eradicated from human nature in those who are not yet glorified.

The sacrificial system described by Ezekiel operates in that setting. It concerns “the house of Israel” in its national life before God. These sacrifices, as presented, are connected with cleansing, reconciliation, and acceptance within that covenantal framework. They do not compete with or supplement the once-for-all sufficiency of Christ’s cross for eternal salvation, but they do serve a real, God-appointed role in the ceremonial and national life of Israel in the kingdom age.

In that sense, millennial sacrifices are efficacious within their appointed sphere for those in mortal bodies—addressing ritual impurity and providing reconciliation for the house of Israel as they live under the messianic reign.



47 Distinguishing “Saints” and “Faithful” in Ephesians 1

Question

Why do you distinguish the saints from the faithful in Ephesians 1:1? Is Ephesians 1:13 the reason?

September 29, 2026

Answer

Paul's wording in Ephesians 1:1 can be taken in more than one way, but the safest starting point is always the normal, default sense of the grammar. The conjunction "and" (Greek *kai*) normally joins two distinct items: "this and that," "me and you," "Jews and Greeks," and so on. Only when context forces us away from that default do we interpret it as appositional ("even," "that is," "also").

In Ephesians 1:1 we read:

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus."

If we follow the default value of *kai*, Paul is addressing two groups: (1) "the saints which are at Ephesus" and (2) "the faithful in Christ Jesus." To collapse them into a single group ("the saints, that is, the faithful") requires clear contextual justification. The question is whether the context of Ephesians supplies such justification, or whether it instead confirms the presence of two groups.

The default sense of *kai*

The New Testament overwhelmingly uses *kai* in its simple coordinating sense. A straightforward example is 1 Corinthians 1:24:

"...unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks..."

Paul is not identifying Jews as Greeks, nor Greeks as Jews. He is uniting two distinct groups under one statement. Likewise, when we read of "the Pharisees and the Sadducees," no reader assumes they are the same group. The default of *kai* is additive, not explanatory.

A sound hermeneutical principle is this: we begin with the normal sense of the word and depart from it only when context makes the normal sense untenable. If we override the default without compelling reason, we substitute our whim for exegesis.

Applied to Ephesians 1:1, the default reading is:

"To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus."

Absent any contrary indication, we should look for two related but distinguishable audiences.

The appearance of "we" and "ye" in chapter 1

The larger context of chapter 1 is crucial. In Ephesians 1:12–13 Paul draws a sharp distinction between "we" and "ye":

"That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in

whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.”
Ephesians 1:12–13

Notice several features:

- “We who first trusted in Christ” are distinguished from “ye also trusted.”
- Grammatically, “we” and “ye” cannot be the same group. If Paul blurs first-person plural and second-person plural, his pronouns become unreliable and exegesis collapses.
- The phrase “who first trusted in Christ” is difficult, if not impossible, to apply to Paul and a purely Gentile body of Christ alone. Paul explicitly was not among the first to trust Christ; he persecuted those who were.

The most natural identification of “we who first trusted in Christ” is with the believing remnant of Israel, often called the “little flock,” associated with the kingdom offer under Peter and the Twelve. They are, historically, those who first trusted Christ in the gospel records and early Acts.

Then, in verse 13, “ye also trusted” introduces another group added later. They heard “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation,” and upon believing were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. The wording implies “your” gospel, over against “their” context. That is, there is at least a distinction of historical position and possibly also of message emphasis.

Up to verse 12, the language is “us” and “we.” At verse 13, Paul introduces “ye” in contrast to that prior “we.” When we see consistent we/ye alternation, we

are obliged to ask whether this is the same twofold distinction as in verse 1: “saints” and “faithful.”

The burden of proof and the flow of pronouns

If throughout the epistle we find two groups—“we” and “you/ye”—treated in tandem, that pattern strongly supports reading *kai* in its default sense in verse 1. The burden of proof then rests on the interpreter who wishes to dissolve the distinction into a single audience.

From Ephesians 1:12 onward, the alternation is evident:

- Verse 12: “we ... who first trusted in Christ”
- Verse 13: “ye also trusted ... ye believed ... ye were sealed”
- Verse 14: “which is the earnest of our inheritance”
- Verse 15: “after I heard of your faith”
- Verse 16: “make mention of you in my prayers”
- Verse 17: “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ ... may give unto you”
- Verse 18: “the eyes of your understanding ... that ye may know ... his inheritance in the saints”

Through chapters 1 and 2 Paul continues to move back and forth between “we/us/our” and “you/ye/your,” sometimes reuniting them under common blessings, sometimes distinguishing their histories:

- Ephesians 2:1: “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins”
- Ephesians 2:3: “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past...”

The pattern “you ... we ... you ... we” is pervasive. That pattern matches the twofold address in verse 1 much more closely than a single undifferentiated audience would.

If we say that in verse 1 “saints” and “faithful” are one and the same group, we are then claiming that in the one place where grammar would naturally signal two groups, it does not; and yet throughout the letter Paul vigorously distinguishes two sets of recipients by pronoun. To maintain that consistency of pronoun distinction and then deny a corresponding distinction in the opening salutation is to place a heavy and unargued burden on the text.

Who are the “saints” and who are the “faithful”?

On this reading:

- “The saints which are at Ephesus” are the already-existing set-apart ones, likely Jewish believers associated with the earlier kingdom program, now in Ephesus.
- “The faithful in Christ Jesus” are those believers (predominantly Gentile, but in the body of Christ sense “neither Jew nor Greek”) who have trusted the gospel of their salvation and been sealed by the Holy Spirit.

The two are not in opposition; rather, Paul is addressing both sets together in one epistle, explaining how their respective histories and blessings converge in Christ, while still recognizing their distinct origins and descriptions.

Why not collapse the two groups?

It is often objected that to distinguish “saints” from “faithful” might imply that “saints” are unfaithful. That objection, however, rests on an unnecessary assumption. One can easily have two overlapping sets, both of which involve genuine believers. The distinction is not “spiritual vs. carnal,” but “prior set-apart remnant” and “those who have believed this later message.”

The key points are:

- The default meaning of *kai* is additive, not explanatory.
- We see unquestionable evidence of two groups in the “we/ye” pattern of chapter 1 (and beyond).
- “We who first trusted in Christ” cannot reasonably be restricted to Paul and his later Gentile converts.
- Once two groups are clearly present later in the chapter, there is no exegetical pressure to override the default reading of *kai* in verse 1.

Thus, the reason for distinguishing “the saints” from “the faithful” in Ephesians 1:1 is not simply verse 13 in isolation, but the cumulative grammatical and contextual evidence of the chapter and the epistle. Ephesians 1:13 is a key piece of that evidence because the “we/ye” distinction there is especially sharp: “we who first trusted in Christ” versus “ye also trusted.” That contrast confirms that Paul is indeed working with two related audiences, and the salutation in verse 1 is best read in line with that reality.

48 The Evil of Our Days and Conflict in Families

Question

Good morning Randy. Why are the days so evil and why is there so much conflict, or drama, in families? Is it because sin entered the world or Satan still at work, or what?

September 29, 2026

Answer

There are multiple layers to why our time feels especially evil and why family conflict is so widespread. Sin is certainly the root reality, and there is indeed satanic activity. Yet if we stop there, we overlook the very real role of human choices, cultural shifts, and rejected moral standards.

Sin as the underlying condition

Scripture presents the entrance of sin as the fountainhead of disorder, shame, and relational fracture. In Genesis 3, after the first sin, shame and hiding appear immediately. In Genesis 4, conflict erupts to the point of fratricide: Cain kills Abel. By Genesis 6, violence and corruption fill the earth.

Sin brings inner corruption: pride, jealousy, anger, bitterness, selfishness. These naturally express themselves in broken relationships. Family drama is one of the earliest and most persistent fruits of humanity's fall.

Satan's work and "passive income"

Scripture attributes real influence to Satan and his doctrines. However, it is not necessary to picture Satan as personally and actively orchestrating every instance of conflict. The lies have been sown, the systems corrupted, the appetites stirred. In that sense, Satan has what could be called "passive income" from sin: the structures and desires he helped build continue to generate evil, even when he is not visibly intervening.

That said, believers should resist the temptation to attribute every family quarrel or social ill directly to satanic activity. Much of it can be explained by sin operating in hearts and cultures that have chosen certain paths.

Why these days feel particularly evil

While human nature has always been sinful, there are historical periods when evil is more socially visible and more culturally accepted. Our time is one of those periods. Several factors contribute:

- **Rejection of biblical moral standards.** Many societies once broadly affirmed what are often called Judeo-Christian values: objective right and wrong, the sanctity of marriage, parental authority, personal responsibility, and the reality of accountability before God. These are now widely discarded.
- **Radical moral relativism.** A growing assumption is that there is no fixed right or wrong, only personal or cultural preference. When nothing is objectively wrong, everything becomes negotiable, including basic faithfulness in family life.
- **Cult of radical autonomy.** Independence is exalted over covenant, commitment, and duty. “I must be true to myself” often trumps “I must keep my promises” or “I must fulfill my responsibilities.”
- **Systemic toleration of destructive behaviors.** As one example among many, widespread drug addiction lies behind much of what is labeled “homelessness.” In many places, resources exist for genuine short-term housing crises, but cycles of addiction and refusal of discipline keep people on the streets. A culture that refuses to name and confront the real problem allows evil to deepen.
- **Abdication of authority.** Parents, and perhaps especially fathers, increasingly relinquish leadership in the home. Discipline is replaced with negotiation, firm boundaries with endless discussion. Children learn that they may challenge every directive and often win.
- **Therapeutic parenting.** Rather than training children to respect authority and practice self-control, parents are encouraged to prioritize the child’s immediate emotional comfort. This produces fragile, self-centered dispositions that do not handle frustration well.
- **Loss of shared moral framework.** Without a commonly accepted standard—for example, the authority of Scripture—every conflict becomes a power struggle of preferences. Peace in such settings tends to be temporary and fragile.

The same dynamics appear in other small communities: churches, classrooms, workplaces. When leadership is weak or diffused, and discipline is viewed as oppressive, drama becomes the norm.

The role of human responsibility

A key point is that Scripture often locates the cause of peril in human desires rather than in direct demonic compulsion. 2 Timothy 3:1–4, though primarily directed to the last days scenario, describes attitudes that characterize many periods of moral decline:

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own

These choices are not forced on us by Satan against our will; they are embraced by societies that have decided to cast off God’s moral wisdom.

Family conflict and chosen patterns

Family “drama” is not inevitable at the level we now see. It flows from certain patterns that have been normalized:

selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.”

Notice that the text does not even need to mention Satan here. The problem is “men shall be lovers of their own selves.” When self-love displaces love of God and neighbor, the relational fabric tears. Families are simply the nearest context in which this tear is felt daily.

Can we simply blame the devil?

It is tempting to attribute the drama in our homes and communities straightforwardly to Satan. But such an explanation can function as a deflection from the hard truth: we often reap what we have collectively sown.

- Societies that tolerate or subsidize destructive habits will have deep social ills.
- Families that refuse to exercise wise authority and discipline will suffer constant conflict.
- Churches that evacuate clear leadership in favor of perpetual, unman-

aged “democracy” will drown in quarrels.

Satan’s lies encouraged these trajectories, but the ongoing maintenance of them is largely human.

What this means for believers

Believers cannot fix an entire culture, but they can order their own homes and congregations differently:

- Reestablish clear, loving, and biblically-informed authority structures in the family.
- Name sin as sin, rather than endlessly relabeling it in therapeutic or sociological terms.
- Refuse to normalize patterns of behavior that inevitably lead to drama (chronic disrespect, manipulation, indulgence of addiction, etc.).
- Teach children and church members that feelings do not define right and wrong.

Evil days are the product of the fall, satanic deceit, and accumulated human rebellion. Family conflict in such days is not simply fate; it is often the predictable outcome of chosen ways of living that contradict God’s moral order. Recognizing that responsibility is the first step toward ordering our own households in a way that stands as a contrast to the surrounding darkness.

49 Anger, Violence, and the Christian Character

Question

Why do Christians sometimes have serious attitude problems and even become violent?

September 29, 2026

Answer

Conversion does not remove the flesh, nor does it instantly produce mature character. Even believers who are otherwise spiritually mature can at times display serious attitude problems and, in some cases, violent responses. The question is not whether this happens—experience confirms that it does—but how it should be understood biblically.

Walking in the flesh versus walking in the Spirit

In this dispensation, believers are complete in Christ, yet still possess the old nature. We can walk in the Spirit or in the flesh. Serious attitude failures and sinful violence are examples of walking in the flesh.

However, it is important not to oversimplify by saying that all strong or forceful responses are necessarily fleshly. Scripture makes room for proper, even intense, anger.

Biblical teaching on anger

Commanded anger

Ephesians 4:26 states:

“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.”

Here, “be ye angry” is an imperative. There are situations in which indifference would be sinful. When wrong is present and demands confrontation, a holy reluctance to be disturbed can itself be a failure.

The warning is “and sin not,” not “never be angry.” Furthermore, the verse presses urgency: do not let your wrath linger until it festers and gives place to the devil. The idea is not merely “get over it before sundown,” but “deal with the matter promptly in a godly way.”

Anger to be put off

On the other hand, Colossians 3:8–10 commands:

“But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice,

blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.”

Here anger is linked with malice and corrupt speech as part of the “old man” that is to be put off. So Scripture both commands and condemns anger, depending on context and motive.

The tension is resolved when we distinguish between principled indignation at true wrong and self-centered, uncontrolled, or malicious rage.

Examples of intense anger in Scripture

Moses

In Exodus 32:19, when Moses comes down from Sinai and sees the golden calf and the revelry, we read:

“And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.”

Moses reacts with such intensity that he breaks the stone tablets. It is an unmistakable act of anger. Yet later, in a parenthetical note, Scripture says in Numbers 12:3:

“(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)”

This is inserted precisely in the context where Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses because of his Ethiopian wife, and where the Lord Himself intervenes suddenly, calling them out and judging Miriam with leprosy (Numbers 12:4–10). Moses, the meekest of men, is not a man devoid of strong reaction; his meekness is not passivity. It appears, in fact, that he had long been patient with murmuring, to the point that the Lord steps in decisively.

Phinehas, Nehemiah, Jesus, and Paul

Numbers 25 records Phinehas taking lethal action in the midst of brazen immorality within Israel. His zeal is credited as righteousness, not condemned.

Nehemiah becomes angry over oppression among his own people and acts to correct it, sometimes with considerable force (see Nehemiah 5 and following chapters).

Jesus, in Mark 3:1–5, looks on religious leaders “with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.” In John 2:13–17, He drives profiteers out of the temple, overturning tables and using a whip.

Paul publicly confronts Peter to his face in Galatians 2, rebuking his hypocrisy regarding table fellowship.

These examples show that intense indignation and even physical action can be righteous when directed at genuine evil,

within God's bounds, for God's honor and the protection of His people.

When anger and violence become wrong

While Scripture allows for, and sometimes commends, strong and even forceful reactions, it also clearly recognizes sinful manifestations:

- Anger that is primarily about wounded pride or selfishness.
- Violence that is disproportionate, uncontrolled, or directed at illegitimate targets.
- Outbursts that function as manipulative tools or tantrums rather than principled stands.

Christians sometimes fall into these because:

- They have brought untransformed patterns from their upbringing into their Christian life.
- They have never learned to distinguish between necessary firmness and self-indulgent rage.
- They confuse strong personality or zeal with virtue, when in fact it may be the flesh in religious clothing.

We must remember that there is “a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up” (Ecclesiastes 3:3). Wisdom is knowing which time it is.

Is there any place for personal violence?

Some would argue that all violence belongs exclusively to the state (Romans 13) as the ordained bearer of the sword. Or-

dinarily that is true: the normal channel for retribution is government, not private action.

Yet there remain extreme situations in which a man, simply as a man, must act decisively to stop a grave wrong in front of him when no governmental force is present. In such cases, a forceful, even violent, intervention may be morally required to protect life or prevent immediate evil. This is a separate matter from hot-headed behavior in personal disputes; it has more to do with emergency moral duty than temperament.

The problem of excessive passivity

Modern culture often swings to the opposite extreme: it treats almost any strong reaction as pathological. Boys on playgrounds are told to avoid any confrontation; bullies are left unchecked. Men are routinely urged to undergo “anger management” of a sort that can amount to flattening all righteous indignation. The result can be a society of passive males unwilling or unable to stand against wrong.

Scripture, however, envisions believers who are meek—under control, aware of the time and place—not paralyzed. There are times when refusing to be angry is the sin.

Why some Christians in particular struggle

Beyond general principles, some Christians have specific patterns of serious attitude problems and sinful violence because:

- Their flesh has been trained to respond explosively over years; habits are not automatically undone at conversion.
- They may have unresolved shame, fear, or insecurity that manifests as disproportionate rage.
- They have never been disciplined in the difference between principled firmness and sinful outbursts.

Such believers need teaching, accountability, and sometimes direct correction. They must learn:

- To evaluate the object and motive of their anger.
- To recognize when they are defending themselves rather than truth or others.
- To accept that sometimes the godly response is to endure wrong patiently.

At the same time, the church should be cautious not to label all strong reactions as sinful. The goal is not to produce believers who never raise their voices or act decisively, but those who know when and how to do so in line with God's will.

Conclusion

Christians can have serious attitude problems and even resort to sinful violence because they still possess the flesh and sometimes walk according to it rather than according to sound doctrine. Yet Scripture affirms that there is a place for righteous anger and, in rare cases, forceful action. The task is to distinguish fleshly rage from godly indignation, to put off the former, and to learn to exercise the latter in the right time and way.



50 Building Biblical Resilience in the Christian Life

Question

What is the biblical way to build resilience?

September 29, 2026

Answer

Resilience is the capacity to endure hardship, to remain steady in difficulty, and to rise again after setbacks. It is both a character trait and the fruit of experience. Scripture does not use the modern term, but it does speak of endurance, steadfastness, patience, and hope under trial.

Resilience and differing temperaments

Some people, by temperament, find it easier to be resilient; others struggle. This variation itself is not sinful. Believers are “fearfully and wonderfully made” with differing personalities. The aim is not to press everyone into a single mold, but to cultivate, whatever our disposition, a biblically grounded capacity to remain faithful under pressure.

A less naturally resilient believer is not thereby disobedient, but will likely need more conscious training and support to face setbacks.

Doctrinal grounding as a foundation

Resilience is strengthened by sound doctrine and a renewed mind. When a believer understands:

- God’s grace as sufficient for the present moment.
- The reality that this age is not designed for ease.
- That problems are not anomalies but normal features of life in a fallen world.

then setbacks, while painful, do not appear as proof that God has failed. Instead,

they are recognized as contexts in which His grace may be experienced afresh.

Resilience and experience

Romans 5:3–5 presents a key pattern:

“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

Here:

- **Tribulation** produces **patience** (endurance).
- Endurance produces **experience**, a kind of provenness.
- Experience produces **hope**, a settled confidence that does not disappoint.

Resilience is thus not created in the abstract. It is formed by actually walking through trouble, enduring it, and discovering that God’s grace sustains. This means that praying simply to “have” resilience, without being willing to endure hardship, is asking for the fruit without the tree.

Practical steps toward resilience

1. Adjust expectations

If we expect a life free of serious difficulty, every hardship will feel catastrophic.

Scripture prepares us instead to anticipate trouble:

- The world is fallen.
- People, including ourselves, are sinners.
- Tribulation is part of the Christian path, even though we are under grace.

Setting our expectations by biblical realism rather than by cultural ideals of comfort is itself a step toward resilience.

2. Focus on truth, not circumstances alone

Resilience requires the discipline of lifting our eyes from immediate circumstances to enduring truths. This involves asking:

- What, in this situation, is unalterably true according to Scripture?
- What does not change even if this problem remains unresolved?

This does not deny pain or minimize loss, but it refuses to let them define ultimate reality.

3. Learn from resilient believers

One of the most practical helps is to identify believers who have walked through significant trials and remained steady. Scripture encourages imitation: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

For someone who naturally lacks resilience, the process may look like this:

- Find a believer whose life displays endurance, composure under fire, and sustained faithfulness.
- Establish a relationship of trust and explicitly tell them: “I struggle with

resilience; I want to learn from you.”

- When struggles come, resist the urge to argue that “they just do not understand” and instead choose, sometimes against your feelings, to act on their counsel.

The difficulty is that in the moment of distress, an unresilient person often instinctively dismisses the counsel of the resilient as naive or uninformed. Recognizing this tendency in advance and deliberately choosing to trust a proven mentor is a crucial discipline.

4. Imitate rather than merely admire

It is not enough to observe resilient people; we must mimic their responses where appropriate. This may mean:

- Adopting their habits of prayer and Scripture intake.
- Adopting their way of framing setbacks (as challenges to be met rather than final defeats).
- Adopting their practice of continuing to fulfill duties even when discouraged.

Imitation is not pretense if the goal is to cultivate genuine growth, and if it is carried out under the light of Scripture.

Resilience and self-talk

Often, those who lack resilience are governed by internal narratives that amplify failure and minimize grace. Part of growth is learning to speak truth to oneself:

- “This is hard, but it is not ultimate.”

- “God’s grace is sufficient for this day, not the next ten years all at once.”
- “Others have faced similar or worse and endured; by God’s help I can take the next step.”

This is not empty positivity; it is aligning our internal dialogue with biblical realities.

The role of the community

Resilience is easier in a healthy church context where:

- Trials are not stigmatized as evidence of spiritual failure.
- People bear one another’s burdens without fostering dependence.
- Stronger believers consciously support weaker ones without condescension.

For someone seeking to grow in resilience, being embedded in such a community is a significant help.

Resilience, worry, and trust

Resilience is closely related to the problem of worry. Some believers are prone to anxiety; others are not. Those who tend not to worry can be, under God, a gift to those who do. For instance, in a marriage, the less anxious spouse can serve as a

barometer: “If he/she is not panicked, I probably do not need to be either.”

The challenge, again, is that worriers often interpret non-worry as ignorance: “They just do not see how bad it is.” Growth in resilience can require the humility to accept that our assessment is not always the most accurate.

Summary of a biblical path to resilience

A biblical approach to resilience includes:

- Accepting that hardship and tribulation are normal in this age.
- Grounding our minds in sound doctrine about God’s grace and purposes.
- Enduring real trials and allowing them, by God’s grace, to produce patience, experience, and hope.
- Intentionally learning from, and imitating, believers who display proven endurance.
- Cultivating truthful self-talk rather than narratives of inevitable collapse.
- Drawing on the support of a healthy church community.

Resilience is not a switch we flip, nor is it a single prayer we pray. It is a developed capacity, under grace, shaped by doctrine, experience, and the examples of others who have walked faithfully through their own valleys.

51 Evaluating Dispensational Claims About Two Distinct Hopes

Question

Is the “Two Hopes” devotional from Berean Bible Society biblically accurate, particularly its distinction between Israel’s earthly hope and the body of Christ’s heavenly hope?

September 30, 2026

Answer

The devotional in view comes from a solid mid-Acts dispensational ministry and reflects a broadly right-dividing framework. Much of its presentation of Israel’s earthly kingdom hope versus the body of Christ’s heavenly hope is biblically sound. However, some of its wording and conclusions go beyond what Scripture clearly states, especially regarding (1) the role and location of the body of Christ in the future, and (2) the use of certain Ephesian texts to support a strict heaven/earth separation.

The piece rightly emphasizes that Israel’s messianic kingdom is the subject of prophecy and that our present dispensation arose after Israel’s rejection of her Messiah. It also rightly denies that the church inherits Israel’s earthly kingdom. The points at issue are more precise: whether our hope includes ruling and reigning with Christ in heaven and whether the body of Christ can in any

sense participate in or be present during the millennial reign on earth.

Strengths in the devotional’s dispensational framework

The article accurately stresses several important truths:

- **The prophetic nature of Israel’s kingdom hope.** The devotional notes that the earthly reign of Christ and Israel’s exaltation are plainly prophesied. This is consistent with passages such as Isaiah 2, Isaiah 11, and the kingdom promises in the Gospels.
- **The temporary setting aside of Israel.** The statement that Israel rejected her Messiah, then continued in unbelief in relation to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and that God paused His program with Israel to introduce a new dispensation, aligns with a mid-Acts understanding and with Romans 11 and Acts 7.

- **The distinctness of the body of Christ.** The devotional rightly affirms that the church, the body of Christ, did not exist before this dispensation and is not Israel, nor a continuation of Israel's kingdom program. That is good right division.
- **Heavenly character of our hope.** Verses like Philippians 3:20 (our "citizenship" or "conversation" is in heaven) and Colossians 1:5 ("the hope which is laid up for you in heaven") rightly indicate that the locus of our hope is heavenly, not earthly. The devotional is correct to contrast this with Israel's earthly kingdom expectation.

All of that is doctrinally sound within a dispensational framework and is helpful for distinguishing Israel and the body of Christ.

Over-statements and problematic inferences

The difficulties arise where the article pushes the distinctions beyond what the text actually says.

Ruling and reigning in heaven

The devotional says that while Israel's hope is to rule and reign with Christ on earth, the body of Christ's hope is to rule and reign with Christ in heaven. Several concerns arise:

- **Lack of explicit textual support.** There is no clear passage that states the body of Christ will "rule and reign with Christ in heaven." Texts about believers being raised, seated,

or blessed in heavenly places describe status and blessing, but they do not clearly describe a heavenly governmental role parallel to Israel's earthly rule.

- **The problem of Christ's location.** During the millennium, Christ is presented as reigning on David's throne in Jerusalem on earth. To assert that Israel reigns with Him on earth while the body of Christ simultaneously reigns with Him in heaven implies Christ's continual presence in both realms or a back-and-forth that Scripture does not describe.
- **Confusing citizenship and reign.** That our "citizenship" is in heaven or that our hope is laid up in heaven does not necessarily mean we exercise rule there. These texts affirm our identity and security, not a defined administrative role over heavenly realms.

It is more biblically careful to say that the body of Christ has a heavenly hope and heavenly blessings than to conclude we will exercise co-regency in heaven parallel to Israel's earthly rule.

A rigid heaven/earth partition

The article also seems to contend that:

"Everything earthly belongs to Israel. Everything heavenly belongs to the body of Christ."

and then concludes that the body of Christ will not return with Christ to the earth at His second coming, nor participate in the millennial scene.

This creates several problems:

- **Unwarranted exclusions.** The notion that Israel receives no heavenly blessings, and that the body of Christ receives no earthly participation, goes beyond Scripture. Israel clearly has promises that involve heavenly realities and glory, not just physical territory, and there is no explicit text that excludes the body of Christ from benefiting from or being present during the millennial reign.
- **Ignoring 1 Thessalonians 4:17.** This verse states:

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: *and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*”

If we are forever with the Lord, and He later returns in visible glory to earth to establish His kingdom, a rigid statement that “we will not be coming back to the earth with Christ” conflicts with the plain implication of always being with Him. To maintain both, one has to posit that Christ never truly reigns on earth physically while we are with Him, which contradicts kingdom prophecy, or that we are “with Him” but somehow not participating in His return, which is difficult to reconcile logically.

- **Conflation of location and inheritance.** It is correct that we do not inherit Israel’s kingdom and do not occupy Israel’s roles of ruling and reigning over the nations. But non-participation in Israel’s governmental structure is not the

same as non-presence on earth or non-enjoyment of millennial blessings. Distinguishing inheritance from presence helps avoid overstating the division.

Thus, the statement that the body of Christ will not return with Christ to the earth appears stronger than Scripture warrants.

Misuse of Ephesians 1 and 2 for a strict heaven-only destiny

The devotional appeals heavily to Ephesians 1:3 and Ephesians 2:6:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” Ephesians 1:3

“And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:6

These are taken as decisive proof that our blessings and sphere are exclusively heavenly, and therefore we cannot have any earthly dimension in the future. Several observations undermine this conclusion.

Ephesians 1:3 and the identity of “us”

If one takes the “us” of Ephesians 1:3 as the body of Christ, consistency requires following that pronoun through the section:

- Ephesians 1:4: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world...” If “us” is the body of Christ, then the body is chosen before the foundation of the world, even though the body of Christ is presented elsewhere as a mystery hidden in earlier ages.
- Ephesians 1:5: “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself...” But Romans 9:4 says of Israel:

“Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption...”

The adoption language naturally aligns with Israel. Letting Scripture interpret Scripture favors seeing the “adoption” of Ephesians 1:5 as Israel’s adoption.

- Ephesians 1:10: The revealed “mystery of his will” concerns:

“that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth...”

This is not Paul’s mystery of the body of Christ but the revealed goal of history: the uniting of all things under Christ in the dispensation of the fullness of times. That is kingdom/consummation language more naturally associated with Israel’s prophetic program.

- Ephesians 1:12:

“That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”

Israel is repeatedly called God’s glory, and Israel, not the later Gentile body of Christ, is naturally “who first trusted in Christ” in a prophetic sense.

If the “us” of Ephesians 1:3–12 is Israel, then using verse 3 as a proof-text for an exclusively heavenly destiny for the body of Christ is exegetically suspect. That section can be read as describing spiritual blessings in heavenly places that belong to Israel, consistent with their status and future in the fullness of times.

Ephesians 2:6 and heavenly seating

Ephesians 2:6 does speak directly about believers in this dispensation: we are raised and seated together in heavenly places in Christ. However:

- The text describes our spiritual position and identification with Christ, not the full geography of our future movements. Being seated in heavenly places in Christ does not logically preclude future participation in events on earth, especially when Christ Himself will reign on earth.
- The devotional presses the phrase “in heavenly places” to mean “not on earth at all in any sense.” That is not a necessary implication. It is one thing to say our blessings and position are heavenly, another to say we are eternally prevented from any earthly scene or enjoyment.

In both Ephesians passages, the devotional reads more into the text than is actually stated, using them to support a very sharp dichotomy between heavenly

and earthly realms that Scripture does not explicitly demand.

A more precise right-dividing conclusion

In light of these considerations, a more cautious evaluation would be:

- The devotional is broadly correct in teaching:
 - Israel’s prophesied earthly kingdom and exaltation.
 - The present dispensation of grace, introduced after Israel’s rejection.
 - The distinct identity of the church, the body of Christ, and our heavenly hope.
 - The non-transfer of Israel’s earthly kingdom promises to the body of Christ.
- However, it likely overstates:
 - The idea that our specific hope is to “rule and reign with Christ in heaven,” a claim not

clearly grounded in explicit texts.

- The assertion that we will not return with Christ to earth or have any earthly participation in the millennial reign, which strains 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and ignores the distinction between inheritance and presence.
- The use of Ephesians 1:3 as a proof that our blessings are heavenly in a way that bars any earthly dimension, particularly if the “us” there is better read as Israel.

Thus the devotional is helpful in its overall dispensational direction, but its pronoun handling in Ephesians and its hard heaven/earth partition appear insufficiently grounded in Scripture. One can appreciate its contribution to right division while still calling for greater exegetical precision and resisting conclusions that go beyond what is clearly revealed.

52 Seminary, Calling, and the Nature of Preaching Ministry

Question

If you had not attended seminary, would that simply make you a street preacher?

September 30, 2026

Answer

Not attending seminary would not reduce a man to being “simply a street preacher.” The term “street preacher” describes a location or style of preaching, not a level of qualification, spiritual maturity, or doctrinal soundness. Biblically, a preacher is a man who proclaims the word of God, regardless of whether he does so in a church building, in a field, or on a street corner, and regardless of whether he holds academic degrees.

Seminary as a modern arrangement, not a biblical requirement

Seminary is a relatively modern, institutionalized way of providing theological education. It is:

- A man-made educational structure.
- Governed in many cases by accreditation standards that reflect the assumptions of academic or denominational gatekeepers.
- Entirely absent as a requirement in Scripture for someone to preach, pastor, or evangelize.

The New Testament lists qualifications for elders/overseers such as character above reproach, ability to teach, sound doctrine, faithfulness, and good reputation (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1). It does not require formal degrees. Evaluation is doctrinal, moral, and practical, not institutional.

Problems with credentialism

Many congregations now demand seminary degrees and years of experience even when the church is small and could be well served by a gifted man from its own midst. The insistence on an “accredited degree” often:

- Excludes capable men whom God has gifted but who lack formal credentials.
- Submits the church’s leadership standards to secular or ecumenical accrediting agencies whose theology may be quite different from that of the congregation.
- Encourages churches to equate academic compliance with spiritual qualification or doctrinal fidelity, which is a serious category mistake.

An accredited degree proves that someone has completed a prescribed course of study and met that school's and agency's requirements. It does not in itself prove sound exegesis, right division, or deep understanding of Scripture.

Alternative paths to being well-trained

A man can become well-trained for ministry without formal seminary:

- Through disciplined personal study of Scripture using good tools and reference works.
- Through mentoring by experienced pastors or teachers.
- Through extensive service in a local church, learning to teach, counsel, and lead.

A hypothetical example illustrates this: suppose a man had only a solid study Bible and gave three years to intensive study, comparable in time commitment to a Master of Divinity program. In terms of biblical content, exegesis, and handling the text, he could easily surpass graduates of large accredited seminaries who have been shaped primarily by institutional cur-

ricula rather than by sustained engagement with Scripture itself.

Preaching identity apart from seminary

Without seminary, a man called by God could still rightly be:

- A pastor or teacher in a local assembly.
- An evangelist.
- A missionary.
- A street preacher, if that is the venue in which he ministers.

His identity as a preacher arises from his calling, gifting, character, doctrine, and faithfulness, not from academic credentials. The distinction between "laity" and "clergy" as a formally credentialed class is a post-biblical development; Scripture emphasizes function and qualification, not institutional authorization.

Therefore, the absence of seminary training would not diminish a genuine preaching ministry to a lesser class. It would simply mean that one has pursued other, often more biblically grounded, means of preparation.

53 Interpreting Joel 2 and the Nature of Joel's Army

Question

Does Joel 2:2-11 describe an army of great people, an army of locusts, or something else?

September 30, 2026

Answer

Joel 2:1–11 presents a formidable invading force associated with the approaching “day of the Lord.” The question is whether this force is (1) a literal human army, (2) a locust plague described in military terms, or (3) a more complex, possibly otherworldly, host symbolized by locust imagery.

- Highly disciplined movement, not breaking ranks, not thrusting one another (2:7–8);
- Entry into houses and windows “like a thief” (2:9);
- Cosmic disturbances accompanying their advance (2:10);
- The declaration: “the LORD shall utter his voice before his army” (2:11).

Key observations from Joel 2:1–11

The passage opens with an alarm:

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion,
and sound an alarm in my
holy mountain... for the day
of the LORD cometh, for it is
nigh at hand;” (Joel 2:1)

Then describes:

- “a great people and a strong” (2:2);
- A fire devouring before them and desolation behind them (2:3);
- Their appearance “as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run” (2:4);
- Motion “like the noise of chariots” and “as a strong people set in battle array” (2:5);

Repeated similes (“as,” “like”) indicate Joel uses figurative comparisons. The text does not straightforwardly answer whether the underlying reality is insect or human; rather, it blends imagery.

Connection with Joel 1 and locust imagery

Joel 1 strongly emphasizes a devastating locust invasion:

“That which the palmerworm
hath left hath the locust eaten;
and that which the locust hath
left hath the cankerworm
eaten; and that which the
cankerworm hath left hath

the caterpillar eaten.” (Joel 1:4)

Shortly thereafter, the invading force is called “a nation” (Joel 1:6), language often used of peoples but here apparently applied to the consuming swarm.

Many interpreters see chapter 1 describing a literal, historical locust plague, and chapter 2 using that plague as the pattern or metaphor for a future, more terrible invasion associated with the day of the Lord. On that reading:

- Joel 2 does not merely repeat the locust plague, but escalates it into a prophetic picture of an overwhelming, ordered force.
- The locust imagery functions as a symbol of total, inescapable devastation, whether the final fulfillment is human, demonic, or mixed.

Human army, locusts, or something else?

Three main options arise:

1. A human army only. Some see Joel 2 as a poetic description of a human military invasion (e.g., Assyrian, Babylonian). The discipline, battle array, and impact on inhabitants fit this. However, details such as falling on the sword and not being wounded (Joel 2:8) and their swarm-like characteristics suggest something beyond ordinary soldiers.

2. A locust plague only. Others read Joel 2 as a heightened description of the same or a similar locust invasion. The earlier chapter favors the locust background.

Yet the very martial language (battle array, mighty men, climbing walls like men of war) stretches insect imagery to the limit and may be typological of something greater.

3. A prophetic, possibly otherworldly, army symbolized by locusts. A more nuanced view sees:

- A historical locust plague in chapter 1 as the backdrop.
- Chapter 2 developing this into a prophetic portrayal of a future, end-time invasion in the day of the Lord.
- The invading host functioning as the *Lord's* army in the sense that He uses it as His instrument of judgment, even if the army itself is wicked.
- The possibility that this army includes or represents non-human entities, a thought supported by comparisons with other prophetic passages.

For instance, Daniel 2:43 speaks of a future mixture that “shall mingle themselves with the seed of men, but they shall not cleave one to another,” which many have taken as suggesting an other-than-human component in end-time powers. When this is set alongside Joel’s language of invulnerability to the sword and the almost supernatural coordination of the host, an otherworldly or transhuman element becomes at least a plausible reading.

Caution regarding “Joel’s army” as the triumphant church

Certain latter-rain and hyper-charismatic movements have popularized the notion

of “Joel’s army” as a final generation of extraordinary believers, endowed with superior spiritual powers, who will conquer the world, overcome all demonic opposition, and establish a dominion before Christ returns. This interpretation often goes hand-in-hand with a postmillennial or dominionist outlook.

This reading is highly problematic:

- The context is judgment associated with the day of the Lord, not a triumphant church establishing righteousness on earth by its own advance.
- The devastating and terrifying character of the army, and the call to repentance that follows in Joel 2, point more to an instrument of chastisement than to a victorious company of glorified saints.
- Constructing an identity for the modern church as “Joel’s army” in this sense requires importing concepts into Joel that are not present in the text.

It is better to avoid using “Joel’s army” language to describe a supposed end-time super-church.

A restrained conclusion

Given the mixture of locust and military imagery and the eschatological setting, the safest synthesis is:

- Joel 1 describes a literal locust plague that God calls “my great army.”
- Joel 2 uses that plague as the pattern and vocabulary for a future, overwhelming force associated with the day of the Lord.
- This future force may be human, demonic, or some other God-directed host, and may well have an otherworldly dimension, but the text does not allow us to specify its exact composition with certainty.

Thus, we can say that Joel 2 portrays a divinely directed, end-time army analogous to an all-consuming locust swarm, used by the Lord as His instrument in the day of the Lord. But we should refrain from dogmatic identification beyond what the text clearly supports.

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