

Articles and Sermons :: The Gospel according to Bill Johnson by James Smith

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A very good friend recently announced with great excitement that he was taking his wife and two young children to live in America for a whole year. As this will involve my friend temporarily leaving his business in the hands of others and of course withdrawing his children from their school, this is no small thing he is doing. I therefore assumed there was a very good reason for his decision.

He explained that he and his wife had enrolled in the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry based in Redding, California. This ministry school is run by Bill Johnson (BJ), who is a world renowned Christian teacher in evangelical circles, with book sales in the millions, and literally thousands of churches around the world being affiliated with his Bethel church and ministry.

I admit that at the point at which my friend told me about his plans to enrol at Bethel School I did not know a great deal about Bill Johnson and his doctrine, but what I had heard second-hand was pretty mixed, and enough for me to be concerned for my friend and want to investigate for myself in more detail just what he was getting himself and his family into. I therefore spent many hours during the following weeks reading, listening and watching Bill Johnson to find out more about him and his ministry. It seemed, for many weeks that I was eating and breathing all things "Bill Johnson", but it did at least mean that my investigations were very thorough. I was genuinely hoping that I would find that what I had been told second-hand would prove to be without substance. However, my investigations exposed much worse than I anticipated. At best what I found could be described as a mixture; some good mixed together with much error (just as poisons can be masked by something sweet).

What I write in this article about Bill Johnson gives me no pleasure and may not bless those who subscribe to his teaching, or those who may be a member of a church affiliated to Bethel. To those people I mean no disrespect, and just ask that they be good Bereans and check out, not just whether or not what I write is true, but whether BJ is biblically true and accurate because the purpose of this article is to warn these people of the errors to which they are exposing themselves.

There may also be some who read this article who have no particular opinion on BJ either way, but just may not like what I write on the basis that they do not believe we should judge in such a personal way; that criticising a fellow believer is in some way unedifying to the faith except of course, if they are judging people who are judging - which shows the hypocrisy of that rationale. To those people I would respectfully suggest that when a Christian finds error being taught it is their obligation and responsibility to expose it, providing their assessment is based on the authority of the Bible and not based on personal opinion or bias. As 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

One of the most common Bible verses used by people who claim we should not be critical or judge other believers is Matthew 7:1:

Do not judge, and you will not be judged.

The Bible can be made to say pretty much anything someone wants it to say if it is taken out of context, so every Bible verse should be properly read in its context if we are to correctly understand it and "rightly divide the Word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Matthew 7:1 should therefore not be read or used in isolation from the surrounding verses which provide the context. Verses 2-5 clearly show that verse 1 is referring to hypocritical judgment.

The lesson is clear: you should not judge others for their sin if you are guilty of the same sin. If Matthew 7:1 means do not judge at all, it would render what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16, together with much of what Paul wrote in his epistles, totally null and void. Much of what Paul wrote was to correct error that had arisen within the church; and Paul was not sh

y in naming specific people. The fact is that Paul used Scripture in exactly the way he advised Timothy it should be used . He used it for "doctrine, reproof, correction, for instruction in righteousness". Notice Paul places doctrine first and that "reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness" can only come from right doctrine.

In this article I unashamedly name Bill Johnson, and others who were or are dangerous false teachers. Is it right to name people specifically? Here are a few examples of Paul doing just that.

Paul named Peter publicly – Peter was guilty of unscriptural practice:

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? (Galatians 2:11-14).

The whole issue revolved around salvation by the law or by grace. When the integrity and purity of the Gospel is at stake, we have no choice when it comes to the matter of exposing error and naming names; no matter who it may concern.

Paul named Hymenaeus and Alexander – Paul told Timothy:

This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:18-20).

God's true servants should "war a good warfare", and name those who have departed from the faith that was once delivered to the Saints (Jude 3). Paul is not discussing here the faith of salvation but the faith as a system of doctrine.

These men had made a shipwreck of it and Paul was calling them out by name.

Paul named Hymenaeus and Philetus – He told Timothy to:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some (2 Timothy 2:15-18).

False doctrine must be exposed and those teaching it should be named.

Paul named Alexander the Coppersmith:

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words (2 Timothy 4:14-15).

It is clear that this is not a personality issue, but a doctrinal problem. Alexander had withstood the words and doctrine of Paul. He was an enemy of the truth.

Paul was not the only person in the Bible who named people.

John named Diotrephes:

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, does not receive us (3 John 9).

John relates how this man prated against him "with malicious words" (Verse 10). He further said:

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God (3 John 11).

There are many more examples, both in the Old and New Testament, but the ones I have mentioned are sufficient for making my point. It is not wrong to name and criticise those whose doctrine and practice is contrary to the Word of God. In fact, the whole Bible abounds with examples of false prophets, false teachers and people practising false things being exposed and named. Faithful messengers will warn the sheep of false teachers and identify them by name. It is not enough to broadly hint at their identity. This is why I am prepared to name Bill Johnson (and others). I believe Bill Johnson's error in doctrine and practice to be serious enough to warn fellow Christians about.

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