
The Gospel according to Bill Johnson

Details

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Editorial Comment

– Since processing this article I have discovered that here in Brisbane, Nexus Church (alias Northside Christian Church (AoG), former senior pastor John Lewis, currently pastored by Murray and Jane Averill - <http://nexuschurch.com.au/about-us/senior-pastors>) is an associate Church using Johnson's 'bible college' modules – (<http://nexuschurch.com.au/encounter-ministry-training/1st-year-modules>), which only goes to show how rapidly and far error spreads. I find this particularly disappointing as the father of Murray, the late Lloyd Averill (1913- 2010) lectured me in Bible College (1957-1959) and John Lewis was a good friend. How alert we must be in these days of deception and departure:

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears - Acts 20:30-31.

Part 1 of a three part series

Introduction

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.[\[1\]](#)

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 shy 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.[\[2\]](#)

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.

2 Peter 2:1 speaks of such people:

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

Within this article and the others in the proposed series I will address key errors in Bill Johnson's doctrine, where they come from and where they lead to, together with some of the key people he is associated with. I will also briefly address supernatural manifestations that he claims are of God.

I believe my research has been thorough enough to ensure that I have not taken anything BJ has said or written out of context. I am nevertheless open to hearing from anyone who believes I am guilty of doing that, providing they are able and willing to specifically identify how and where I am thought to be at fault.

Bill Johnson's Theology on Healing

Healing is a huge part of Bill Johnson's ministry and teaching, so I spent a substantial amount of time trying to be a good Berean (Acts 17:11) to determine if what he claims about healing can be found in and substantiated by Scripture.

Bill Johnson's theology on healing (the core and mission of his whole ministry) is perfectly illustrated by a question and answer session I watched on video in which BJ was asked if God ever causes sickness. He started to answer that question by making reference to the time when Jesus was sleeping in the boat and a great storm began. He made no reference to where this story occurs in Scripture, and I can only surmise that this is because he goes on to directly misquote it for the purpose of answering the question wrongly.

The story he referred to is in Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-40 and Luke 8:22-25, so for the purpose of fairness let us look at the relevant passages in all three gospels:

Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marvelled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" - Matthew 8:23-27.

Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" - Mark 4:39-40.

And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm - Luke 8:24.

BJ said that, "Jesus slept through the storm because the world He was sleeping in had no storm; He was living in a realm of kingdom reality and actually living in a realm called peace."

This pseudo-spiritual nonsense sounds lovely, but is not based in the reality of Scripture. Jesus lived in and through the very same world and experiences (and temptations) that His disciples did (Hebrews 4:15), but still overcame them (Hebrews 2:18). If that were not so it would render His sacrifice as utterly pointless and without power.

BJ then goes on to explain that, "The disciples woke Jesus up and He **released peace** onto the storm to still it." This is utter rubbish and a total misquoting of Scripture. Matthew 8, Mark 4 and Luke 8 all say that Jesus "**rebuked the winds and the sea**"; He did not quell the storm by releasing peace onto it. He **rebuked** it. Mark 4 certainly tells us that Jesus said, "*Peace, be still!*", but after He had **rebuked** it to be still; He **commanded** the storm to **be** still. He did not **release** peace onto, or into, the storm.

This obvious misquoting of Scripture by a world famous teacher and pastor is bad enough in itself, as it completely misrepresents the biblical truth of what happened and what Jesus actually did, but the reason BJ misrepresented Matthew 8, Mark 4 and Luke 8 is even worse. He did it in an attempt to find biblical justification for his wider false doctrine of whether God can actually cause sickness—one bad premise is used to justify another bad premise. He does this with **many** issues and **many** Bible

passages because the only way he can find biblical justification for many of his doctrines is to misquote and misrepresent Scripture.

Returning to the question of whether or not God can ever cause sickness, BJ went on to explain that, "You can only give away what you have, and this is why Jesus was able to give away peace in order to calm the storm" (ignoring of course the misquoting and misrepresentation of the story about Jesus and the storm and that Jesus in fact **rebuked** the storm and did not calm it by releasing peace onto it). He then asked the question, "Can God give away sickness?" He answered his own question by smugly saying, "No, God cannot get sick, therefore God cannot give away sickness, because you can only give away what you have."

We all agree with the first part of BJ's statement: "God cannot get sick"! However, as with so much of BJ's teaching, this little truth is then mixed in with a huge untruth by claiming God therefore cannot give sickness, which then creates a false principle about God that Scripture itself totally contradicts. Here are just a few examples from the Bible of God **giving** (causing) sickness:

But the hand of the Lord was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumours - 1 Samuel 5:6.

So the anger of the Lord was aroused against them, and He departed. And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper - Numbers 12:9-10.

So the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Take for yourselves handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and let Moses scatter it toward the heavens in the sight of Pharaoh. .And it will become fine dust in all the land of Egypt, and it will cause boils that break out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt." Then they took ashes from the furnace and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses scattered them toward heaven. And they caused boils that break out in sores on man and beast - Exodus 9:8-10.

Then Uzziah became furious; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there, on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him - 2 Chronicles 26:19-20.

So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died - Acts 12:21-23.

Daniel 4 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar was driven to madness by God, and John 9:1-3 even gives us an example of God allowing disease – blindness – not as a punishment, but to reveal Himself and His mighty works through that blindness and the subsequent healing by Christ:

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.

A further New Testament example is provided in Acts 13:4-12 where Paul inflicts blindness on the sorcerer Bar- Jesus.

So, does God have tumours, or leprosy, or boils, or madness, or blindness? Of course not! God gave all these things (and more) to people, but does not have them Himself, thus proving without question

that BJ's doctrine is absolute rubbish. This error is the very basis for his theology that causes him to claim: "I refuse to create a theology that allows for sickness."

To further disprove BJ's false claim that God cannot give away what He does not have (being of course used to try to persuade us that God does not cause sickness), let us briefly look at the subject of evil spirits. The Bible is clear that God is not evil. He does not have any evil in Him, so by BJ's logic and doctrine that means God cannot send evil spirits to people. However, Scripture is clear that God did send evil spirits to people to be used for His divine purposes:

Now the distressing spirit from the Lord came upon Saul as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand - 1 Samuel 19:9.

God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech - Judges 9:23.

Therefore look! The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against you - 1 Kings 22:23.

I could use other examples from Scripture, but will allow the above to suffice for the sake of brevity.

BJ's claim that God cannot cause sickness because He cannot get sick is utter rubbish and relies on his audience knowing less about Scripture than he does; and judging by the whooping and clapping by the watching audience in response to BJ's ridiculous statement, that was clearly the case in the example I watched.

BJ can "refuse to create a theology that allows for sickness" if he wants, but it is entirely something else when he teaches other people this unbiblical error. James 3:1 warns that teachers will be judged more severely. It is undeniable that God **does** sometimes intentionally allow, or even **cause** sickness to accomplish His sovereign purposes. While sickness is not directly addressed in the passage, Hebrews 12:5-11 describes God disciplining those He **loves** (verse 6) to "*produce a harvest of righteousness*" (verse 11). Psalm 23:4 speaks of the Shepherd (God) using both the rod and the staff with the flock. The rod is used to discipline and the staff is used to guide.

Being in a relationship with God is not all about us demanding blessing from Him; we work out our salvation "*with fear and trembling*" (Philippians 2:12). Sickness **can** be a means of God's **loving** discipline. It is difficult for us to comprehend why God would work in this manner, but it is nevertheless clear from Scripture that He can and does.

One of the clearest examples of this in Scripture is found in Psalm 119. Notice the progression through verses 67, 71, and 75:

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word...It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees...I know, O LORD, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

The author of Psalm 119 is doing what BJ fails to do: he looks at suffering from God's perspective. It was good for the Psalmist to be afflicted. It was faithfulness that caused God to afflict him. The result of the affliction was so that he could learn God's decrees and obey His Word.

Clearly sickness is not part of God's eternal plan for His creation, but neither is sin and death and Christians still sin and die! We were not originally made to die and leave our bodies and be unclothed spirits (2 Corinthians 5:1-4). So let me state categorically that sickness and death are tragic and I long for the day when that last enemy is put under the feet of King Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:26). However BJ's problem is the theology that he teaches on healing, which demands now that which God has planned to be totally fulfilled only later in eternity, i.e. the total eradication of all sickness. BJ puts the

proverbial “cart before the horse” by trying to apply to earth now what God has planned for His eternal Kingdom. BJ does this in order to make demands of God now, and if those demands are not met, he goes on to claim that the problem must reside with the person who remains in sickness, because BJ “refuses to create a theology that allows for sickness.” Does God heal? Of course He does. Do I pray for healing? Of course I do; but it is not necessarily God’s will to heal every time we ask. Furthermore, healing is not automatically a part of salvation, as BJ (and many others) claim. I have already demonstrated how God can and does use sickness to fulfil His purposes. BJ’s refusal “to create a theology that allows for sickness”, is of course rooted in his doctrine of “healing in the atonement” i.e. his understanding and interpretation of the meaning of that phrase – “healing in the atonement”.
Healing in the Atonement

A key aspect to BJ’s theology on healing is that he claims that healing is a right and something that God is obligated to do for every Christian through “healing in the atonement”, as do many other false teachers in the Word of Faith movement. This false doctrine says Christ died for our sins and suffered for our healing. It divides the atonement up between what Christ did on the cross and the suffering He experienced prior to going to the cross. This is based on a misrepresentation of Isaiah 53:5:

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

“By His stripes we are healed” - The context here is of healing from **iniquity** (sin). Christians who believe in the doctrine of “healing in the atonement”, in the way it is taught by the *Word of Faith* teachers, completely ignore the obvious context. They take the text out of context and create a pretext.

Isaiah 53 v 5 is quoted twice in the New Testament:

1. Romans 4 v 25, where the context is again Jesus’ suffering for our sins.
2. 1 Peter 2 v 24-25, where the context is again that of healing from sin.

From my investigations it is obvious that BJ is aware of the New Testament use of the Greek word sozo for salvation, as I know he runs a specific ministry by that name. On the Bethel website sozo is claimed to mean “saved, healed and delivered” – Sozo contains the whole package of being made whole or well.” Sozo actually more accurately means “to save, keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction”. It is derived from an obsolete Greek word saos that simply meant “safe”. It is a verb that is translated as “to save” and the noun form, soteria, is translated “salvation”.

Now, the big question is: is there physical healing in the atonement? I would have to say yes, there is a physical aspect to salvation, and whilst the use of the Greek word sozo in the New Testament is mainly in the context of spiritual healing from sin, it can and does have a physical application. Matthew 8:16- 17 testifies to this:

When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: “He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.

What Jesus did in Matthew 8:16-17 was in fulfilment of Isaiah 53. This proves that the atonement cannot be divided up as people like BJ and my friend claim. The events described in Matthew 8:16-17 occurred before Calvary; they were before the atonement. Christ did take upon Himself our infirmities and bore our sicknesses as He looked forward to what He would achieve on the cross. Christ atoned for our sins and our physical infirmities on the cross. Scripture makes absolutely no distinction or separation between how Christ paid the price for our sins and how He physically suffered for our physical infirmities; that has to be read into Scripture in order for people like BJ to say that he “refuses

to create a theology that allows for sickness” because he believes God is obligated to heal all Christians’ physical ailments through Christ’s physical suffering - “*by His stripes we are healed*”.

Everything Christ atoned for was done on the cross and everything Christ did on the cross was for sin. All the physical ailments that come to mankind are as a result of sin, and Christ dealt with sin on the cross. Is there, therefore, healing in the atonement? Yes, but not in the way BJ and his associates claim.

It is not because of Christ’s suffering i.e. “*His stripes*” healing us, and it is not something God is obligated to provide for every Christian here and now. Claiming that puts the proverbial “cart before the horse”.

Salvation means that we will all be truly and fully saved from all our enemies: the devil, death, sickness, sin etc., but not all now. Part of this has an eternal aspect that BJ refuses to accept. We can say we are saved (sozo’d) now, because it has already been accomplished in Christ’s death and His being risen. We still look in faith to the **future** manifestation of it when we too are raised in our glorified bodies and are fully and eternally set free from sickness and death. This is what Romans 8:22-25 teaches:

For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. ... we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

I cannot imagine that any Bible believing Christian would disagree when I say that Paul was as complete a Christian that will ever be on this earth, yet he said his condition was that of groaning within himself, “**waiting** for the redemption of the body”. He said the redemption of the body was a hope, not a present possession. In Romans 8:10 Paul says the body is dead because of sin. The Christian has eternal life; his sins are forgiven; his name is written in Heaven; he is a child of God. However, the Christian lives in a body that is under the curse of death, and the Christian lives in a world which is still under the curse of God because of sin—a world which “groans and labours”.

Therefore, whilst the Christian can live a life of victory and fruitfulness through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, he is still under the influence of the troubles and pains of this wicked and corrupt world. Whilst God can and does heal the sick, the full release from the troubles of the flesh will come at the “*redemption of the body*” (Romans 8:23). Making a doctrine that says anything more than that is just plain wrong. Of Jesus Himself it is record that “*the power of the Lord was present to heal them*” (Luke 5:17). For us to command from God healing on people at our will is something even Christ did not do. We should not blame people who remain sick, as if it is, somehow inevitably their fault.

Next – MIXTURES and MANIFESTATIONS – Influences of William Branham, Bob Jones, Todd Bentley et al

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James (Jamie) Smith is a financial adviser who gives specialist advice to doctors and dentists based in Sheffield, England, where he was born in 1970. He was raised in a Christian family and became a believer in his childhood. Jamie is married to Emma. They have two young daughters, Holly and Heidi, and are members of a small independent evangelical church in Sheffield. Jamie writes on various matters of the Christian faith with the aim of encouraging and equipping fellow believers to “*earnestly contend for the faith*” (Jude 3) by being able “*to give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope within us*” (1 Peter 3:15).

Footnotes

1. All Bible references taken from NKJV
2. Paul, and the other New Testament writers do not say that Jews should stop being Jews. Rather, they say that Gentiles do not become Jews or Jewish

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