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An Invasion of Error

A Review of Bill Johnson—*When Heaven Invades Earth*

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Bill Johnson of Redding, California has become a popular teacher in one of the latest iterations of the Signs and Wonders movement. His book, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, reveals his underlying theology. Johnson believes that there will be a great end-time revival that will be initiated by an “Elijah generation”¹ (a concept from the heretical Latter Rain movement) that shall transcend all other generations of Christians in regard to their ability to do great works of power. Johnson claims the following about himself and associates: “We will carry the Elijah anointing in preparing for the return of the Lord in the same way that John the Baptist carried the Elijah anointing and prepared the people for the coming of the Lord” (Johnson: 184).² Supposedly these elitists will set off a great revival of signs and wonders greater than those of Jesus. This miracle explosion, they expect, will cause a great revival before the return of Christ. Johnson states, “I live for the revival that is unfolding and believe it will surpass all previous moves combined, bringing more than one billion souls into the Kingdom” (Johnson: 23).

The basic premise is that God always wants to do abundant and remarkable miracles but is kept from doing so by the fear and unbelief of the church. God awaits the arrival of specially anointed and enlightened Christians who will make it possible for Him to bring at long last an invasion of heaven to earth before the return of Christ. That is the point of Johnson’s title. His subtitle is *A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles*. Accordingly, with the

right information, zeal, desire, piety, faith and anointing, any Christian can “make the supernatural natural” (Johnson: 133).

In this article I will show from Johnson’s book that he has departed from orthodox Christian teaching in many serious ways. He teaches the heretical *kenosis* doctrine about Christ. He denies the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*. He embraces pietism, elitism, subjectivism, fideism, dominion theology, and many other errors. I will claim that his supposed end-time revival is actually end-time apostasy.

How to Introduce Heresy

As I read Johnson’s book, I noted the various errors in it by category. At the end of the process the largest number of entries was under “anti-scholastic bias.” Johnson is firmly against careful scholarship based on sound exegesis of Scripture. To him, such study is likely to bring one into bondage and spiritual death. Sadly, this bias is widespread in current evangelicalism, but Johnson is quite blatant in his rejection of scholarship.

Johnson claims, “For decades the Church has been guilty of creating doctrine to justify their lack of power. . .” (Johnson: 116). It is hard to imagine what “problem” he is reacting to when most of our evangelical educational institutions are committed to postmodern mysticism, with their heroes being mystics like Dallas Willard and Richard Foster. It is hard to find a Bible college or seminary that does not promote “spiritual formation,” which is merely a fancy term for Roman Catholic mysti-

cism. Yet Johnson decries the presence of doctrine. We will see later just how willing he is to depart from orthodox doctrine.

He resorts to an often misused passage that promotes his anti-scholastic bias: “A powerless Word is *the letter* not *the Spirit*. And we all know, ‘The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life’” (Johnson: 116). This twisting of Paul’s meaning in 2Corinthians 3:6 has a long history of use to promote subjectivism and mysticism. The false implication is that studying the Bible will kill you spiritually. The context shows that Paul was speaking of the letters written on stone (verse 3), meaning the Decalogue. Paul explains how the law “kills” in Romans 7:5, 6. It kills because of our sinful passions that it exposes, not because it is studied for what it means.³

For example, does “you shall not steal” have some secret, mystical meaning that can only be assessed by certain elite persons with subjective spiritual impressions, or does it mean what it says? It means what it says. But to truly live as a person who is free from the sin of stealing we need the grace of God that comes through the gospel. In 2Corinthians 3, Paul is speaking of those who have the Law but reject Christ. Bill Johnson is warning Christians that studying the Bible will kill them. In so doing he abuses the passage and lowers the value of Scripture in the minds of his readers.

Johnson warns against “a powerless Word.” The only way God’s Word lacks power is if we refuse to believe and obey it. Johnson suggests that he and others like him who refuse to be taught the truth but relish signs and wonders have “power.” The rest of us who love and believe God’s Word (from Scripture, understood according to the Holy Spirit inspired authors’ intent) are supposedly powerless. Johnson’s teaching is false

and is abusive to the Lord's flock. Ordinary Christians who cannot replicate the miracles of Jesus and His apostles are relegated to a lesser category: powerless Christians to be pitied by elitists like Johnson.

It is easy to see where Johnson is taking his attack against Christian scholarship:

Those who feel safe because of their intellectual grasp of Scriptures enjoy a false sense of security. None of us has a full grasp of Scripture, but we all have the Holy Spirit. He is our common denominator who will always lead us into truth. But to follow Him, we must be willing to follow off the map—to go beyond what we know. (Johnson: 76)

We will see in the next section just exactly where Johnson has gone “off the map” and where he wants to take us. The claim that we cannot know the Scripture but can know what the Holy Spirit is saying by other means is absurd. The Bible claims that Scripture is the Holy Spirit speaking to the church. The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures. We understand the Bible using our intellect.

Johnson's approach is to use the person of the Holy Spirit as an excuse to reject scholarly Bible study in favor of undefined, subjective religious experiences. He further denigrates the Bible:

But in reality, the Bible is a closed book. Anything I get from the Word without God will not change my life. It is closed to insure that I remain dependent on the Holy Spirit. (Johnson: 93)

His categories are false. The Bible is the Holy Spirit speaking to us and its power is not dependant on us using religious experience to escape its boundaries. Any lack of life-changing power is due to unbelief, not the meaning of Scripture as correctly understood. But Johnson claims that the Holy Spirit leads us off the map. Thus he denigrates

sola scriptura.

The absurdity of Johnson's claim is such that it amazes me how many are deceived by it. For example, the claim that the Holy Spirit leads us into truth (which He does through Scripture) by some subjective means that go “off the map” and beyond an “intellectual approach” is disingenuous. Those who go off the map are going somewhere. If they have gotten information directly from the Spirit about where they think they should go and then follow it, they are using their intellect as well. The subjective information from the spirit realm must register in someone's mind in order for them to act on it. So if the intellect is a bad thing when contemplating the Scriptures, why is it a good thing when determining which subjective impressions to follow? But Johnson warns, “The Church has all too often lived according to an intellectual approach to the Scriptures, void of the Holy Spirit's influence.” This false dilemma (i.e., either intellect or Spirit) fools his readers into thinking that if they attend hyped up meetings such as Johnson promotes, the Spirit is at work; whereas if they were to carefully study God's once-for-all revealed Word they would be stuck in a “powerless” situation (Johnson: 76).

By discounting careful Bible study, scholarship, and using one's mind Johnson disarms his readers to the point that they are susceptible to heresies such as those he teaches. For example, “Reaction to error usually produces error” (Johnson: 51). If this is true, why did Paul write Galatians, Colossians, and other of his epistles to correct error? Johnson brags that he doesn't read any books of people who disagree with his version of revivalism. He consistently downplays or rejects the value of scholarly study. He says: “It's in the environment of worship that we learn things that go way beyond what our intellect can grasp” (Johnson: 44). That statement reminds me of one I read from a New Ager who suggested we contemplate “the sound of one hand clapping.” How do we learn things but they never register on our minds? Probably by subjective, religious feelings that remain

undefined. By such feelings people like the Dalai Lama feel close to God. But *are* they?

Johnson Goes “Off the Map” by Teaching a False Christology

Bill Johnson embraces a doctrine that teaches that during His earthly ministry Jesus operated only as a man and not God. Johnson claims that Christ laid aside His divinity. Johnson says, “He performed *miracles, wonders, and signs*, as a man in right relationship to God . . . not as God. If He performed miracles because He was God, then they would be unattainable for us” (Johnson: 29; emphasis and ellipses in original). Johnson's theology requires that Christians do greater miracles than Jesus. If Jesus' divinity had any influence on His mighty works, then we might think we could not do the same (and rightly so). So Johnson embraces what is often called the *kenosis* heresy—that Jesus laid aside His divine nature. He writes elsewhere: “He laid his divinity aside as He sought to fulfill the assignment given to Him by the Father . . .” (Johnson: 79).

Johnson's priority that believers must be able to do signs and wonders causes him to make many statements that blur the distinction between us and Christ and thereby diminish the uniqueness of Christ: “For us to become all that God intended, we must remember that Jesus' life was a model of what mankind could become if it were in right relationship with the Father.” (Johnson: 138). On the contrary, the Biblical writers claimed that Christ was the Creator (see John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2). Jesus was affirmed to be the unique divine son (Mark 9:7) by a voice from heaven. Jesus' deity was affirmed many places in the gospels. The gospel writers used Jesus' mighty works to prove His deity. If Johnson is right and Jesus had laid aside His deity, then the mighty works prove only that Jesus learned what anyone could learn if he had the right faith and relationship to God. The claims of the gospels thereby become moot. Jesus is no longer unique, but

only a special enlightened one who could lead the way to many such enlightened ones in the future. Thus we have a New Age Christ rather than the Biblical one.

If Johnson is correct and we can do greater works than Jesus (based on his misinterpretation of John 14:12; Johnson: 136), then whoever did greater works would have even greater reason to make himself the object of someone's faith and worship.⁴ The apologetic that points to Jesus' life and miracles as proof of His deity would become worthless because others could do the same.

The *kenosis* doctrine is based on a misuse of Philippians 2:7 where Paul says that Jesus emptied Himself. False teachers claim that Jesus "emptied" Himself of deity and became only a man during the Incarnation. This claim is tantamount to the outright denial of Christ's deity. This important issue is missed on people like Johnson, who attack the validity of Christian scholarship. Johnson's denial of Christ's deity during His earthly ministry is the same as the Word of Faith heresy's denial of Jesus' deity when He died on the cross. They claim he lost His divinity and suffered in hell as a man. Both denials are blatant heresy. Let me explain why.

Bill Johnson's Unbiblical Doctrine of God

A truly theistic understanding of deity has certain necessary definitions. The most basic definition is "eternal, non-contingent existence." The reason such a definition is essential to Christian theology is to distinguish God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture from other deities. The God of the Bible is unique: "*To you it was shown that you might know that the Lord, He is God; there is no other besides Him*" (Deuteronomy 4:35). The true God is eternal, and He created the world out of nothing. All false gods are created (if they have any status of existence), and thus are not eternal. The prophet wrote: "*Thus you shall say to them, 'The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish*

from the earth and from under the heavens" (Jeremiah 10:11). The New Testament claimed that Jesus was the Creator to establish His true deity.

Non-contingence is a corollary to God's eternal existence. If God existed from all eternity before anything else existed, there is nothing outside of God that could have caused His existence. This means that God as God is not contingent on anything outside of Himself. This is important because in Bill Johnson's Christology, Christ's deity is contingent. It goes away during the Incarnation only to return later. That which comes and goes is not eternal and non-contingent. This is the same fatal error of the Word of Faith heresy and similar to other such errors that were condemned in church history. The heretic Arius was famous for saying about Christ, "There was a time when He was not." Various Christological heresies were rejected by early church councils and the definition of Chalcedon (451) stands as a valid definition based on the true teaching of Scripture. Chalcedon is valid only as much as it is based on sound, Biblical exegesis, not simply because it is a creed from church history. The prologue of John's Gospel (John 1:1-18) claims that Jesus existed from all eternity as God and with God. The prologue contains an allusion to Exodus 34:5-7 where Yahweh revealed Himself to Moses as the One who is full of grace and truth (John 1:14 and see John 1:16). Jesus is thus equated with Yahweh the Creator.

What does this have to do with Bill Johnson and *kenosis*? If Jesus' divinity can be laid aside then it was never true divinity. Deity is not an attribute that comes and goes. It *is* or it *is not*. If lost and then regained it is contingent, and if contingent, then not true divinity. Anything less leads to every form of heresy, cult, and New Age teaching. If divinity can be gained, then created man can possibly attain it. The Bible denies this. Furthermore, if divinity can be laid aside it is not divinity. R C Sproul explains:

If God laid aside one of his attributes, the immutable

undergoes a mutation, the infinite suddenly stops being infinite; it would be the end of the universe. God cannot stop being God and still be God. So we can't talk properly of God laying aside his deity to take humanity upon himself.⁵

If Jesus laid aside divinity, that would be proof that He never had true divinity. Thus Johnson's doctrine is a *de facto* denial of the deity of Christ. Christological heresy is heresy. Period.

So what does Philippians 2:7 imply that Jesus did empty Himself of? The answer is not divinity, which is eternal and cannot be compromised, but divine prerogatives. Paul's point was about Christ's humility that we should emulate, not His ontological status as God. Sproul explains:

I think the context of Philippians 2 makes it very clear that what he emptied himself of was not his deity, not his divine attributes, but his prerogatives -- his glory and his privileges. He willingly cloaked his glory under the veil of this human nature that he took upon himself. It's not that the divine nature stops being divine in order to become human. In the Transfiguration, for example (Matthew 17:1-13), we see the invisible divine nature break through and become visible, and Jesus is transfigured before the eyes of his disciples.⁶

The true doctrine of Christ is that in the Incarnation He took upon Himself humanity, not that he laid aside deity. The Incarnate Christ is fully human and fully God. In theology this is called the hypostatic union.

Johnson claims that the Holy Spirit has led him "off the map." I agree that Johnson is indeed "off the map." The "map" for Christians is Holy Spirit-inspired Scripture. Our doctrine is to come from the Bible (2Timothy 3:16). The "map" draws out boundaries and

when we cross those boundaries we are not merely lost, we are in ungodly error. The Holy Spirit does not lead God's people off the map that He has given us, once for all.

So Johnson gives us a double whammy. First, he warns against scholarship and scholarly Bible study under pains of becoming spiritually dead. Then he introduces heresy that his followers have no means to discern because they have been scared away from the necessary tools for discernment. This is how entire movements depart from Christian orthodoxy and are plunged into theological ruin. The *kenosis* heresy is a damnable heresy and is as egregious as the Arian heresy, which still has life in modern times through the Jehovah's Witnesses. Christological heresy is not an aid to the working of the Holy Spirit as Johnson claims, but it grieves the Holy Spirit.

Likely Johnson's thousands of followers have no idea they are being led into rank heresy. They come for the signs and wonders in the hope that they will do greater miracles than Jesus. They are mesmerized by the claims that they shall be part of an Elijah generation that will defeat evil on the earth before the return of Christ. Very few will ever realize that the doctrine of Christ they are taught departs from the teaching of the church that has been embraced by nearly every Christian group for centuries.

It could be argued that the definition of Chalcedon is unbiblical (which it is not). But the burden of proof lies with those who would deny it. One cannot lightly reject the doctrine of Christ that has held sway for centuries. To do so would require extensive theological work and Biblical argument designed to persuade conservative Christian scholars. One cannot go into such an undertaking lightly. But Johnson does, glibly denying the deity of Christ for no better reason than he thinks that doing so will likely make it easier for Christians to think they can do greater miracles than Jesus. He doesn't offer any scholarly proof that his *kenosis* doctrine is Biblical. Why should anyone take him seriously? Sadly, thousands do.

Signs and Wonders Theory

More important than anything else, for Johnson and followers, is the presence of signs and wonders—the more the better. The reason for this is that they are a necessary prerequisite for the hoped for end-time revival that will be initiated by an “Elijah generation” of elite Christians. Says Johnson, “Our mandate is simple: raise up a generation that can openly display the raw power of God” (Johnson 27, 28). Having such power is what he calls an “authentic gospel” because “powerlessness is inexcusable” (Johnson: 27). We are the problem, he claims, because God wants to do miracles but He cannot because of our bad thinking. Miracles await the coming of a generation of enlightened ones who will know the secret. Thus we have a New Age definition of miracles.⁷

To show that in Johnson's theology the supernatural is something that can be learned and mastered by man (thus robbing it of valid supernatural status), we see that he has a school of the supernatural. It is called the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry.⁸ Once the supernatural can be mastered by learnable and reproducible processes, it is no longer supernatural, but natural. Thus in the New Age we have “A Course in Miracles.” In such thinking, there is nothing truly supernatural because all of nature is infused with God (panentheism). Given his distaste for scholarship, Johnson likely does not see the implications of his “school of the supernatural.”

If there is a process to be learned or a religious state to be achieved whereby miracles can be produced by humans at will, such miracles become natural events. Johnson claims, “The purpose of the anointing is to make the supernatural natural” (Johnson 133). This sounds like the opening of a whole new world, but it involves bringing the concept of “supernatural” into a panentheistic world view rather than a Biblical one. The Biblical concept of supernatural requires a theistic view of the universe in which the transcendent God of the Bible created the world out of nothing, but stays involved in His creation providentially. God can and does inter-

vene in human affairs. The work of Christ is truly supernatural. Christ was not some enlightened One who learned and shared secrets that would work for anyone else with the same level of enlightenment. That view of Christ is that of the New Age. Christ's works were truly supernatural because the Creator of the universe was on the scene of history and proved His true identity.

If the supernatural becomes “natural,” as Johnson claims, through those who have a superior anointing, then the uniqueness of Christ is compromised. The supernatural was always there to be accessed by those with special experiences and insights, thus it is not truly supernatural, but part of nature. Miracles, in such a worldview, are not miracles from a Biblical perspective.

When Paul spoke of power in relationship to the gospel, he spoke of the power of God to save Jew and gentile through the cross: “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*” (**Romans 1:16**). Paul uses the term “power” the same way in 1Corinthians: “*For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*” (**1Corinthians 1:18**). God's power through the cross saves us from God's wrath against sin. False teachers can perform signs and wonders but they have no true power as Paul speaks of it. The arrogant teachers who came to Corinth had words of knowledge (*gnosis*) and wisdom (*sophia*) but lacked the power of God that saves lost sinners (1Corinthians 4:19, 20).

What is truly lost on Johnson and his followers is that the Bible predicts false signs and wonders at the end of the age. There is no prediction in Scripture that an invasion of true miracles from God will happen at the very end. For example Jesus warns: “*For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect*” (**Matthew 24:24**). “Christs” are literal “anointed ones.” There will be those who claim to be anointed in some special way that will do great signs and wonders. They

are false. Antichrist (whose name and role is based on the concept of “anointed”) will do great signs and wonders (2Thessalonians 2:9). Paul also predicts end time deception in 2Timothy chapter 3.

Johnson brushes the possibility of such deception aside by calling these signs “counterfeits” (Johnson: 110). False signs and wonders as warned against in the Bible are not sleight-of-hand magic tricks, but real signs that point to a false message. Thus the discerning of spirits concerns objectively evaluating teaching (1John 4:1-5) not subjectively evaluating apparent miracles. A psychic healing might be a real healing, but it is not from God. It is known to be false by the false teaching of the healer. If such a false teacher produced a real, verified healing, the teaching and teacher would still be false. Thus Moses warned of false prophets whose signs come true, but point to a false deity:

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 13:1-3).

By combining signs and wonders with a false Christology that denies the deity of Christ, Johnson has placed his followers in the center of end time deception. Now rather than the one “Anointed One” (Jesus Christ who is unique), there are many “anointed ones” who supposedly can do greater miracles than Jesus. This situation is described in the Bible: “*Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour*” (1John 2:18). “Antichrists” as understood from the

Greek, are substitute “anointed ones.” In the Bible, all Christians are equally “anointed” by God, and only Jesus specially anointed, i.e., the Messiah.⁹ An elite group of specially anointed ones who comprise the “Elijah generation” as taught in Bill Johnson’s Latter Rain theology would qualify as antichrists.

A related question is whether or not Johnson and company are actually doing greater miracles than Jesus. In Luke 8, Jesus is shown to have calmed the sea, delivered the most demonized man imaginable, healed the sick, and raised the dead. Luke’s point is that Jesus has power over nature, Satan, sickness and even death. Thus Jesus is Lord of the universe, and His claims are true. Do any of Johnson’s Elijah generation elite display greater power and authority than Jesus did in Luke 8? He lists a number of typical manifestations in a section he entitles, “When God Colors Outside the Lines.” They include laughter, gold dust appearing from nowhere, oil appearing from nowhere, wind in a closed room, a cloud appearing, fragrance smelled, gems appearing, and feathers falling in meetings (Johnson: 141). Most of these have no precedence in Scripture, and none of them is as profound as the Messianic signs of Luke 8.

There is a certain naiveté that accompanies those who follow signs and wonders theory. I once hosted a regular pastors meeting. At one of these a pastor attended who had just come from witnessing the so-called “Toronto Blessing” (the laughing revival as it was called). He recounted how he was standing in a food line and one of the attendees began gobbling like a turkey, strutting around, and using his elbows as turkey wings. The pastor concluded that God was at work. There is nothing bizarre enough to the point that true signs and wonders believers will question it.

Signs and wonders that accompany a false Christology such as that of Bill Johnson do not thereby prove the existence of a great end-time revival. Rather, they prove the existence of end-time deception as predicted in the Bible.

Dominion Theology

Johnson’s theology contains a blend of many problematic movements of our day. One of them is the dominion teaching, popular in the Word of Faith movement. The idea is that Satan was able to wrest the earth, and authority over it, from Adam and Eve, leaving God on the outside having to figure out a way to get it back. His plan was for Jesus to come and take it back from Satan (which is what Word of Faith teachers say happened in hell during Jesus’ supposed stay there—to wrestle with Satan as a man, and not God). Jesus then, according to theory, delegated to the church the job of taking control of the earth back from Satan and putting it under the church.

Johnson teaches “All that Adam owned, including the title deed to the planet with its corresponding position of rule, became part of the devil’s spoil” (Johnson: 31). Like others of his ilk, Johnson uses Satan’s offer of the kingdoms during Jesus’ temptation as proof that Satan, not God, had the “keys of authority” to the earth (Johnson: 32). Jesus got them back and gave them to the church (Johnson: 32). Proof that we have regained the dominion that Adam supposedly lost is to be found in achieving the attributes promoted by Word of Faith teachers: “In Adam and Eve’s commission to subdue the earth, they were without sickness, poverty, and sin. Now that we are restored to His original purpose, should we expect anything less?” (Johnson: 33).

Johnson interprets the Lord’s Prayer, which is primarily a prayer for the return of Christ, in terms of his “kingdom now” theology: “This is the primary purpose for all prayer—if it exists in heaven, it is to be loosed on earth” (Johnson: 59). This means that if we do not have problem free lives, we lack faith, pray wrongly, or fail to understand our role as having dominion. Johnson explains: “Such an invasion causes the circumstances here to line up with heaven” (Johnson: 59). This invasion is in the title of his book.

Johnson’s over-realized eschatology sees the sensibilities of many Christians,

informed as they are from the Bible, to be a problem that will stop revival: "The second greatest reason for revival's end [behind quenching the spirit interpreted as any questioning of bizarre manifestations] is when the Church begins to look for the return of the Lord instead of pursuing a greater breakthrough in the Great Commission (Johnson: 161). Earlier Johnson had interpreted the Great Commission in terms of his dominion theology (Johnson: 32). Those who correctly understand the Lord's Prayer become the problem people who stop revival. Longing for the Lord's return is discouraged. Eschatology of the soon return of Christ is replaced with eschatology of dominion, kingdom now, that sees the concept "maranatha" as a threat to revival.

A Deluge of Error

The rejection of scholarship and careful exegesis, in Johnson's case, leads where it always does: to diverse theological errors. There are many that would take too long to cover in detail but need to be addressed. I shall do so briefly in this section.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism was an ancient heresy that claimed that the material realm was evil and the spiritual realm good. Johnson states, "Faith is the key to discovering the superior nature of the invisible realm" (Johnson: 43). The truth is that both realms, visible and invisible contain both good and evil. Both are created by God, and neither is innately superior. When the Bible speaks of things not seen, it includes things like the fulfillment of future promises and is not limited to ontological "realms," such as material and spiritual. Johnson claims that there is an unlocked potential for seeing into the supposedly superior spirit realm: "Many of us have thought that the ability to see into the spiritual realm is more the result of a special gift than an unused potential of everyone" (Johnson 43). He misuses Hebrews 11:1 to teach his Gnostic understanding of realms: "The invisible is superior to the

natural . . . Because the invisible is superior to the natural, faith is anchored in the unseen" (Johnson 45). But in Hebrews 11, what was unseen to the patriarchs was the future fulfillment of the promises of God, not just the heavenly realities (though those are included). There is much evil in the unseen world, so Johnson's Gnostic categories are not what the Biblical authors had in mind.

Elitism

The Bible promotes the necessity that every member of the body of Christ is seen as important and essential, whatever their gifts may be (1Corinthians 12:14 – 25 and Romans 12:3-8). But Johnson repeatedly speaks of an elite group of Christians that shall be greater than all other groups in church history. Of course those will be the ones associated with his movement and others who embrace the Latter Rain heresy. (International House Of Prayer in Kansas City is another example). For example: "Much of the opposition to revival comes from soul-driven Christians. The apostle Paul calls them *carнал*" (Johnson: 47). He goes on to claim that the spirit (not capitalized in translation, signifying the human spirit) influencing the mind produces true learning. His categories are reminiscent of Watchman Nee, whose false teachings harmed me early in my Christian life. Paul does not teach that the soul is problematic and the human spirit good. The revivalists that have true enlightenment by following their spirits rather than souls, are of course those who listen to Johnson and other such teachers. They are the elite ones, and the rest of us are left trying to understand the Bible. It is the few who have the real glory: "He lives in all believers, but the glory of His presence comes to rest on only a few" (Johnson: 149). The enlightened ones are part of the "Elijah generation" (New Order of the Latter Rain terminology) "But there will be no contest when such counterfeits go up against this Elijah generation that becomes clothed with heaven's power on the Mount Carmel of human reason-

ing" (Johnson: 150). His attack on reason is unabated. His categories falsely divide the body of Christ into the enlightened ones and the rest of us who wait to be defeated by the elitists. Johnson's proclivity to dismiss people whom the Lord has saved and placed in His church is stunning in its brazenness.

Fideism

Many of these errors are closely related. Fideism is the belief that faith operates independent of reason and needs no rational proof for its validity. Fideism is shown in this statement: "When we *learn to learn* that way [by faith], we open ourselves up to grow in true faith because faith does not require understanding to function" (Johnson: 47). Again, he is misusing concepts from Hebrews 11. For example, Abraham had to understand God's promises to have faith in them. Faith is not disconnected from rational content in the Scripture as it is in Johnson's fideistic theology.

Pietism

Johnson shows the same pietistic tendencies as many in today's evangelical world of mysticism. He warns about the lack of "power encounters" and fear of experiences that might lead us away from scripture. He then states: "But it is illegitimate to allow fear to keep us from pursuing a deeper experience with God!" (Johnson: 92). He warns: "God is bigger than His book" (Johnson: 92). The obvious implication is that we must have extra-biblical experiences unless we live as lesser Christians ruled by fear. Pietists often look to higher order experiences to validate their Christian experience.¹⁰

Subjectivism

Johnson promotes a mystical Jesus disconnected from Scripture, objectivity and historical verification. His is not "Jesus come in the flesh" as John taught. His is a Jesus of mystical encounter. Johnson warns that knowledge of the Bible can make us proud:

Conclusion

[double indent] “Knowledge puffs up. . .” [1Corin. 8 partially cited, with no discussion of the context] Notice Paul didn’t say *unbiblical* knowledge, or *carnal* knowledge. Knowledge, including that which comes from Scripture, has the potential to make me proud. So how can I protect myself from the pride that comes from knowledge, even when it’s from the Bible? I must be certain it takes me to Jesus! (Johnson: 94)

Nothing is solved because Paul warns in 2Corinthians 11:4 about “another Jesus.” The most popular “Jesus” in today’s world is the cosmic Christ of the New Age who also is known for power and miracles. Johnson claims that personal revelations and an “encounter with God” will keep us from pride and seeking glory (Johnson: 94). This is patently false. Johnson and followers claim to be able to do greater miracles than Jesus, but they are not proud? Those who search the Scriptures and confess the Christ of the Bible *are* thereby proud? One wonders why Johnson cites the Bible at all since he does not think it means what it says apart from a mystical revelation by the enlightened reader. It is amazing how elitists who make extravagant claims in which they are the heroes and the rest of us the unenlightened dolts think they are humble and us ordinary Christians (sinners saved by grace) are filled with pride. Self-delusion is a horrible state to be in. If the Bible cannot be trusted to correct us, why would we expect undefined experiences from the spirit world under the banner of “Jesus” can be trusted?

The invasion of heaven promoted by *When Heaven Invades Earth* is in reality an invasion of theological error. Johnson says there is no sickness or poverty in heaven, which is true. However, there is also no falsehood or error in heaven. Johnson’s potpourri of error is astounding in its breadth. His is a classic case of zeal for a cause divorced from theological truth. In his thinking, zeal for signs and wonders (and the resultant end-time revival) baptize any theological errors, including his heretical Christology.

My conclusion is not overly harsh: that this movement is not really from heaven, as it is claimed to be. Many young people are targeted and deceived by it. Powerful experiences in a Christian context form a potent elixir that dulls ones theological senses. I know because when I was young, I was drawn into a similar movement based on experiences that I allowed to trump sound Biblical exegesis. Thankfully God saved me out of that and led me, through Scripture, to the true gospel. May many who are in the clutches of this false revivalism be spared as I was.

End Notes

1. Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth – A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles*, (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2003) 150. All subsequent citations from this book will be bracketed within my text.
2. See *Critical Issues Commentary* issue 103 for a discussion of latter day apostles, the Latter Rain movement and their false understanding of an “Elijah

Company” that will appear to defeat God’s enemies.

3. See *Critical Issues Commentary* issue 16 for a full discussion of 2Corinthians 3:6 and its common misuse in the church.
4. See *Critical Issues Commentary* issue 65 for contextual and exegetical analysis that disproves this misinterpretation of John 14:12: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue65.htm>
5. R C Sproul: *How Could Jesus be Both Divine and Human*: <http://www.ntslibrary.com/Online-Library-How-Could-Jesus-Be-Both-Divine-and-Human.htm>
6. Ibid.
7. See *Critical Issues Commentary* issue 23, “New Age Miracles”: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue23.htm>
8. See <http://www.ibethel.org/site/school-of-ministry>
9. See *Critical Issues Commentary* issue 63, “Antichrists and The Antichrist”: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue63.htm>
10. See *Critical Issues Commentary* Issue 101, “How Pietism Deceives Christians”: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue101.htm>

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