

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

What is Bethel Church, Redding, CA?

GOT QUESTIONS

Bill Johnson and Bethel Church (Redding, California) and the churches that follow the lead of Bethel Redding are firmly within the New Apostolic Reformation movement, which is unbiblical and spiritually dangerous. The Bethel Church can be characterized as promoting Word of Faith teaching, the prosperity gospel, dominionism, “grave sucking,” and other aberrant doctrines and practices.

Bethel Redding has also become associated with certain phenomena that are interpreted by the leadership and the congregation as manifesting the presence and glory of God. The phenomena include the appearance of “glory clouds” and gold dust and “angel feathers” falling from the ceiling (or perhaps from the ventilation system). Some of the phenomena, such as the “angel feathers,” are easy to critique. Nowhere does the Bible say that angels have feathers. Rather, angels are spiritual beings and most often appear as men. To assert that feathers falling from the ceiling must be evidence of angels nearby is absurd. Likewise, in the Bible, whenever the glory of God was manifest, the universal response was fear and conviction (see Isaiah 6). The response of those in the Bethel movement is usually wonder mixed with excitement, dancing, and recording it with cell phone cameras. While these particular phenomena are never mentioned in the Bible and are somewhat eccentric, they are not the main problem at Bethel.

The bigger problem stems from the theology of the Bethel Church and Bill Johnson, who was influenced by the likes of John Wimber and the false teachers of the Toronto Blessing. Consistent with others in the New Apostolic Reformation, Johnson teaches that people today are receiving direct words from God and that the offices of apostle and prophet have been restored to the church. In this way, Johnson presents a low view of Scripture: the Bible must be either incomplete or insufficient, if we must keep adding to it with the words of modern-day prophets.

At Bethel Church, healing and deliverance are the evidence of “real” gospel ministry. There must be demonstrations of power. Signs and wonders are evidence of salvation. Bethel teaches that we can speak things into existence by faith or that we can even



Lion and Lamb Apologetics

command God to speak them into existence. According to Bethel, physical healing was purchased in the atonement of Christ, and God wants to heal. Christians should not pray for healing by saying, “If it is Your will,” because by faith we know that it *is* His will to heal. (Bethel Church claims to have experienced incredible instances of healing and even resurrections, but, as usual, these accounts are difficult to independently verify.)

Bill Johnson also criticizes Christians who rely more on the Bible than on the Holy Spirit. He states that most Christians operate under a Trinity of “Father, Son, and Holy Bible.” According to Johnson’s own testimony, early in his ministry he knew correct doctrine but did not have any power, and he did not experience the presence of God. When he finally did experience that presence, after seeking the experience by faith, he knew that this was the missing key to effective Christian living and ministry. According to Johnson, what Christians need is not doctrine but the manifest presence of God, and Bethel Redding is committed to seeking and experiencing this. “Bethel Redding’s mission is to create a vibrant family of hope-filled believers who deeply experience the love and presence of God and partner with Jesus to express the joy and power of His kingdom in every area of life” (from the church’s official website, accessed 5/13/19).

While there is much on Bethel’s website about spiritual experiences, there is precious little doctrine. Under the “We Believe” heading are the following points of doctrine:

- ✎ There is only one true God who is the eternal King, Creator and Redeemer of all that is.
- ✎ He is perfectly holy, just, loving and truthful.
- ✎ He has revealed Himself to be eternally self-existent—one being in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- ✎ The Bible to be the inspired and only infallible and authoritative Word of God.

Revival is emphasized on Bethel’s website, and there are hints of the gospel there (“We believe Jesus Christ’s sacrifice of Himself made grace available that has the power to transform any individual’s life”). However, the gospel is never clearly defined. Rather than speak of repentance and faith, there is an emphasis upon an “encounter with Christ,” which is understood in physical and emotional terms. In addition to visceral encounters with Jesus, there is a consistent emphasis upon the power that Christians should display, especially in the area of healing. Through the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, Bethel Redding conducts training on how to begin a “lifestyle of healing and miracles.”

Bill Johnson’s teachings are misguided and imbalanced. At the very least, we can conclude that Bill Johnson and Bethel Redding omit discussion of vitally important issues

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

at the heart of the gospel and elevate other issues to a place they do not deserve. In the process, they teach a lot of things that are biblically inaccurate. "I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who . . . put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (Romans 16:17).

© GotQuestions.org. Accessed: February 26, 2020.

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Bethel-Church-Redding.html>