

The Physics of Heaven #5

A Serial Book Review & Theological Interaction: Part 5

Review of Chapter 4: *Recovering Our Spiritual Inheritance* by Bill Johnson [1]

“God is glorified by not speaking in plain language to you. He’s glorified by speaking in parables, symbols and dark sayings.” (TPOH, 31)

–Bill Johnson

Though this chapter does not fit *The Physics of Heaven’s* exploration of the ways quantum science can energize the Christian faith (i.e., tap into Pentecostal power by harnessing the universe’s quantum “sounds, vibrations, or frequencies”), the authors decided to include Bill Johnson’s teaching “on recovering our spiritual inheritance . . . because there are whole realms of insights that belong to the people of God we’ve failed to explore and, therefore, haven’t been leaving as a legacy for future generations.” (TPOH, 29) If today’s indifferent Church fails to move forward by reclaiming “lost ‘God truths’,” “a vacuum forms that the enemy fills” and “future generations of Christians” will lose the inheritance this generation should have left to them. [2] (TPOH, 29) In developing this theme, Johnson employs the word “inheritance(s)” and “generation(s)” numerous times. [3] The chapter’s title, “Recovering Our Spiritual Inheritance,” suggests that there’s an inheritance out there to be recovered, reclaimed and bequeathed to future generations. “It’s time to start constructing . . . a hundred-year vision,” he says later. (TPOH, 37) So what does Johnson mean by the “legacy” he wants this generation to reclaim and pass on to future generations of Christians?

The Inheritance—“Hidden Things”

The inheritance has to do with “anointings, mantles, revelations and mysteries that have lain unclaimed . . . because the generation that walked in them never passed them on.” (TPOH, 30-31) Along with other of the book’s contributors, Johnson believes they possess the potential and possibility “to recover realms of anointing, realms of insight, realms of God that have been untended for decades . . . and perpetuate them [in what he calls a “domino effect”] for future generations.” (TPOH, 31) He believes that “there are realms opening up right now to people because they realize their destiny . . . that God has ordained and given them access to hidden things” [Ed. *hidden* means *occult*]. (TPOH, 32) To buttress his hand-me-down theory, Johnson quotes Deuteronomy 29:29 (*italics in the NKJV translation, emphasis added*), [4]

The **secret** *things belong* to the Lord our God, but those *things which are* revealed *belong* to us and to our children forever, that *we may* do all the words of this law.
(TPOH, 31)

Extracting the word “secret” from this verse, Johnson then leapfrogs to the Gospel of Luke (though he fails to cite the verse’s location) to connect Moses’ statement to one Jesus made to His disciples when He told them (Johnson rewords Luke 8:10), “It’s the Father’s good pleasure to give you the **secrets** [Greek, *mysterion*, “mysteries”] of the Kingdom.” From this verse

Johnson observes that, “Jesus taught in parables, not to reveal truth, but to hide truth.” (TPOH, 31) Then he gave this stunning opinion embracing esotericism (that only a limited number of initiates can comprehend meanings):

Truth is not hidden from you; it’s hidden *for* you. . . . *God is glorified by not speaking in plain language to you. He’s glorified by speaking in **parables, symbols and dark sayings.*** (Emphases added, TPOH, 31)

Seekers of the Secrets

According to Johnson, it thus becomes the responsibility of the “royal priesthood”—the king’s kids—to realize they have “legal access” to explore and unlock the secrets (the parables, symbols and dark sayings) and leave the things they discover as an inheritance for future generations. [5] (TPOH, 31) So “trip out” into the mysteries all ye seekers, and delve into the “realms of science, of politics, of business, of creativity in the arts” to discover God’s secrets. From these realms this generation will discover a legacy to hand down to future generations because Jesus told Johnson, “The things that are revealed are for you and your children forever.” (TPOH, 32) A legacy then “enables us to start our Christian life at spiritual levels that might have taken us years to reach. Another generation’s ‘ceiling’ in God can become our spiritual ‘floor’.” (TPOH, 30) What exactly constitutes an inheritance is vague, but in addition to personal revelations from God, may involve recovering the experiences of “mystics” and “revivalists” that in past centuries “broke into realms of the Spirit to leave something” (TPOH, 38) But regardless of the past, Johnson says, “We’ve never seen the accelerated spiritual growth that comes from inheritance. We’ve never fully seen what a spiritual ‘jump start’ can mean to the next generation.” (TPOH, 30)

But before addressing other issues raised in this chapter, Johnson’s twisting of Scripture ought to be noted. Bill Johnson’s mixing of words Moses spoke to Israel in Deuteronomy 29:29 and those spoken by Jesus to His disciples in Luke 8:9 serve to illustrate the author’s misuse of Scripture.

Scripture Twisting

Deuteronomy 29:29—“secret things”

Regarding the importance of this verse to construct his doctrine of discovering “secrets” in order to create a legacy, Johnson stated that, “I want to make sure you get this message out of Deuteronomy because it sets a stunning precedent throughout Scripture.” (TPOH, 34) On several points, Johnson distorts this Scripture’s meaning to fit his preconceived notion about what he wants the Bible to say. [6]

First, as the verse upfront states, “The **secret things belong to the LORD** our God, but the **things revealed belong to us and to our sons** forever, **that we may observe all the words of this law**” (Emphasis added, NASB). These words of Moses present a stark contrast (How can it be missed?) between the unrevealed “secrets” *belonging to God* and “things revealed” *belonging to man*. [7] God, not man, owns the secrets. They are His, not ours. As one commentator points out, “The contrast . . . between what is hidden and what is revealed lies between *things that are known only to God, which humans may leave to him, and his laws that*

he has made known, which they must obey.” [8] *The point:* the secrets belong to God and if by hook or by crook humans can know them, the secrets are no longer secret! They no longer belong to the Lord.

Second, Johnson transposes Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 29 to have been spoken by Jesus. He says, “Jesus said [and then paraphrasing Deuteronomy 29:9b], ‘The things that are revealed are for you and your children forever’.” (TPOH, 32) The problem is that Jesus was not speaking in the 29th chapter of Deuteronomy. Moses was! Moses was giving a summary statement to Israel regarding the nation’s obligation to observe and obey the commandments God had revealed to, not concealed from them. Impossible it is that God would be require His people to obey secrets they had no knowledge of. The Ten Commandments, as well as the other parts of the moral and ceremonial Law, were not esoteric, but public. So Johnson muddles the words Moses spoke and ascribes them to Jesus, words the Gospels do not verify Jesus said. [9]

Third, as based on Deuteronomy 29:29, Johnson suggests contemporary Christians should prepare to discover divine secrets God has sequestered in the realms of science, business and the arts. When found out, these secrets will become an inheritance for this generation to pass on to future ones. But there are problems with developing this scenario from this chapter. *The Law*, not secrets hidden in science, *is the legacy*. The whole chapter concerns keeping commandments, not discovering secrets. Yet Moses (not Jesus) warns Israel that despite the Lord’s providential dealings with the nation, “Yet to this day *the Lord has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear*” (Emphasis added, Deuteronomy 29:4; Compare Isaiah 6:9-10; Ezekiel 12:2.). During the course of Israel’s history and for reason of their sinful and rebellious ways, the people had difficulty obeying the things Yahweh plainly revealed to them, and Moses’ words warn of judgment for their disobedience.

Fourth, Moses warns Israel against adapting their ways to the ways of the Egyptians and other pagan nations (Deuteronomy 29:18). So why does Johnson suggest, based upon the closing verse of Deuteronomy chapter 29, that there are secrets to be discovered by climbing mountains (like Mt. Sinai, the revelatory mount where God gave the Law to Israel through Moses) into “realms of science, of politics, of business, of creativity in the arts” in order to receive new revelation to influence and control society (i.e., Dominionism). As they would confront the pagan cultures surrounding them, Moses is commanding Israel to do the opposite! (Deuteronomy 29:14-21) The entire chapter warns the nation of the catastrophic judgment that awaited them if they did not accept and obey the “inheritance” the Lord had revealed to Israel through Moses, if they left their “legacy” by accommodating their national life to that of the pagan nations surrounding them.

Luke 8:9—“parables, symbols and dark sayings”

In explaining the genius for exploring the “secrets” of God, Bill Johnson boldly states: “God is glorified by not speaking in plain language to you. He’s glorified by speaking in **parables, symbols and dark sayings.**” (TPOH, 31) In other words, plain language is not the sufficient vehicle to carry God’s communications to humans. [10] Therefore, the role played by parables, symbols and dark sayings in the Bible should be noted because of the important place they occupy in other religions, secret societies and cults. [11]

Parables

Obviously Jesus used parables to teach “mysteries.” [12] In making his case that God is most glorified when He speaks in parables, Bill Johnson refers to Luke’s record of Jesus’ Parable of the Soils. (Again, no specific reference is given. Readers have to figure out that Luke 8:4-8 is being cited). So in a Q & A format, the verse alluded to by Johnson reads:

The Disciples’ “Q”: What does this parable mean?

The Lord’s “A”: To you *it has been given to know* the mysteries [Greek, *mysterion*, secrets or hidden truths] of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that “Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand”. (Emphasis added, NKJV)

Johnson assesses correctly that while God gave Jesus’ disciples “to know [with His explanation to follow, Luke 8:11-15] the mysteries of the kingdom of God,” He did not in this instance explain to unbelievers the understanding of His parabolic teachings. As did Isaiah’s prophesying to Judah and Jerusalem in their unbelief (In context and to explain the Jewish rejection of Jesus their Messiah, Matthew cites Isaiah 6:9-10.), Jesus’ parabolic teaching served to further entrench the resisters in their rebellion and unbelief. These smug and complacent religious folk, for reason of their being unrepentant (a spiritual condition that is trans-generational) were under divine judgment and didn’t even know it. In other words, the disciples considered Jesus’ parable to be a revelation and asked Him about its meaning, while unbelievers proudly asked no questions as they dismissed His parables as riddles—the communications of a wise rabbi temporarily arousing their intellectual curiosity in and discussion about the parables’ “meanings” only then to dismiss Jesus’ teaching and walk away in the dust of unbelief.

Note: Unlike true learners, the superficial followers did not ask Jesus about the meaning of what He said. The problem was not with the transmission of God’s revelation by Jesus (if so, nobody would understand any of His teaching), but with the rebellious Jews’ attitude toward and reception of it. God’s judgment caused rebel Jews to consider Jesus’ words to be esoteric, enigmatic and parabolic utterances that any great teacher of that era might utter. The rebels in the generation which heard Jesus preach didn’t “get it” because they really didn’t “want it” (See 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.). So by His use of earthly illustrations, Jesus was not obfuscating but communicating divine truth.

Jesus did not leave the meaning of the *Parable of the Soils* shrouded in mystery and secrecy. After they asked, the Lord gave His disciples (and us) the parable’s interpretation and meaning (Luke 8:11-15). Though He did not do this with every parable He spoke, He did so in this instance and ironically, this parable which Jesus explained is the one Johnson uses to springboard into his assertion that in an occult sort of way, God most glorifies Himself by communicating in mysteries and secrets.

Jesus was speaking to a mixed multitude (some believed Him, most did not), and what was true of rebels then remains true of rebels now. Jesus didn’t leave mysteries for future Christians to explore. He spoke truth, witnessed to and recorded by the Disciple-Apostles (John 17:20), a

legacy to be accepted and believed by future generations. The idea that God is most glorified when He speaks in parables doesn't jive with Scripture. Excepting perhaps the parable Nathan spoke to David (2 Samuel 12:1-10), "Parables are otherwise rare in the OT . . ." [13] If God is most glorified when He speaks in parables (plus symbols and dark sayings), then there's much straight-forward communication in both the Old and New Testaments that does not give God the "most glory." We now turn to Johnson's assertion that God's communication by symbols glorifies Him.

Symbols

Though the use of symbols is common among many religions and cults, the word "symbol" is not found in the Bible. It therefore becomes difficult to comprehend what Bill Johnson means when he states that God is "glorified by speaking in . . . symbols." (TPOH, 31) Rosemary Ellen Guiley remarks that, "Symbols are important to all esoteric teachings, for they contain secret wisdom accessible only to the initiated." [14] The *Masonic Square and Compass* symbol and Mormonism's *Choose the Right* shield are but two among numerous examples. Guiley then refers to Swiss psychiatrist Carl G. Jung (1875-1961) who "lamented the deterioration of the symbolic nature of Christianity." [15] Why the deterioration? Because other than the memorial of the bread and cup of communion (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) and the rite of baptism (Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Corinthians 1:16), Jesus left no symbols as legacies for the church to recognize. He, not statutes, symbols, sounds, smells, smoke and songs, is to be the focus of believers' attention. In focusing upon these other enhancements (They might be called legacies!), danger exists that Christians and the Church will forget Christ Himself who is "the exact representation" of God's nature (Hebrews 1:3). Occult religion thrives on traditions (Legacies or inheritances?) that titillate the senses of sight, touch, sound, smell and taste (See Deuteronomy 4:15-20.). [16] True Christianity thrives upon faith alone, "the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). This brings us to "dark sayings."

Dark Sayings

As quoted by Matthew in his explanation as to why Jesus spoke in parables, the English word translated "dark sayings" (Hebrew, *chiydah*) occurs in various translations of Psalm 78:2. (Matthew 13:35 quoting Psalm 78:2, KJV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV, ESV; See Proverbs 1:6, KJV, ASV). Generally the Hebrew word (*chiydah*) can carry meanings of "riddles, hard questions, enigmatic sayings or perplexing questions." [17] In this Psalm specifically, the word means "a lesson taught indirectly." [18] That "dark sayings" lays parallel to "parables" (Hebrew, *mashal*) in Psalm 78:2, suggests the two words carry connected meanings, the meaning of the one explaining the other. Both words (*mashal* and *chiydah*) are explained in context by the verse that follows Psalm 78:2. Verse 3 explains: "Which [parable and dark sayings] we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us" (Psalm 78:3). *Note*: parable and dark sayings were already considered a legacy by Psalm 78. So the contents of the "parable" and "dark sayings" were not mystery, but history! The contents were not secrets-hidden but historical-observations (i.e., lessons taught) which were passed down by and among the Hebrew people from generation to generation. So in the Psalm's context, "dark sayings" does not refer to esoteric or hidden truth. These parables and dark sayings were, "An exposition of the true design and meaning of the history of Israel . . . which escaped a merely superficial observation." [19] But what had escaped the notice of Israel?

Israel's history was littered with examples, as this Psalm rehearses, of God's gracious redemptive acts toward the Israelites and their callous indifference to them. In a teaching format, Psalm 78 recounts God's blessings upon and deliverances of Israel (Psalm 78:5-8, 23-30, 38-39, 42-53, 54-55), the nation's rebellions against the Lord (Psalm 78:9-20, 36-37, 40-41, 56-58), an exceptional instance of repentance by the Israelites (Psalm 78:34-35), and the curses the Lord placed upon His people for their rebellion (Psalm 78:21-22, 31-33, 59-64). Though spoken by one generation to the next (Psalm 78:3-4), the obvious interaction between God and His people was *a historical legacy Israel ignored!* The enigma or riddle was that the very people for whom the Lord had done so much appreciated it so little. They were oblivious to the obvious. A commentator observes that, "Matthew quotes Psalm 78:2 ("dark sayings") in reference to the parables uttered by Jesus "which [parables] made sense to the teachable but remained riddles to the self-willed." [20]

The intergenerational rebellious attitude rehearsed in Psalm 78 was again manifested by the generation of Jews that rebelled against and rejected Jesus (Matthew quoting Psalm 78:2 in his Gospel, chapter 13, verse 35). The words of Jesus were not intrinsically "dark," but were extrinsically perceived as riddles by the rebels. The rebels in the generation which heard Jesus preach didn't "get it" because they really didn't "want it" (See 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.). As the Apostle Paul wrote,

We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery. . . . Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
 (1 Corinthians 2:7- 8, KJV)

Another Psalmist stated: "Your word [God's communication] is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105; See Proverbs 6:23.). In "light" of this forthright statement, it becomes difficult to see how "God is glorified by [His] speaking in . . . dark sayings." (TPOH, 31) Is not light the opposite of dark? Is there any darkness in God and if there is not, how can "dark sayings" originate or come from Him? (See 1 John 1:5.)

The Master Communicator

To summarize—there was nothing esoteric or dark about Jesus' teaching. He didn't leave secrets in the form of parables, symbols and dark sayings for today's Christians to explore and decipher to create a new legacy to pass on to future generations. No, God's working among the Jewish people and their indifference to and rebellion against His word to and work for them is a matter of historical record. Note the response of those who heard Jesus teach (Emphasis added):

- When the crowds heard this, they were *astonished* at His teaching.
 Matthew 22:33
- The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was *astonished* at His teaching.
 Mark 11:18

- They were *amazed* at His teaching, for His message was with authority.
Luke 4:32
- Never has a man spoken *the way this man speaks*.
John 7:46

According to Johnson's paradigm (i.e., that the kind of communication by which God glorifies Himself is to be found in parables, symbols and dark sayings), we would be forced to conclude that Jesus' language did not glorify God because on average, the crowds immediately understood Him even when He spoke in parables (Mark 12:12). The Apostle John referred to Jesus as the Word, the supreme communicator between heaven and earth. Jesus claimed He did not speak upon His "own initiative" explaining that "the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak" (John 12:49; See John 7:16; 8:26, 28; 14:24; 17:8.). There was nothing dark about what Father told the Son to speak and there was nothing dark about Jesus' communication. Fact of the matter is, God's "sayings" become "dark" to those who refuse listen to Him and rebel against His word (Amos 5:18; Zephaniah 1:15). Dark sayings do not come to man from the God who is light. Dark sayings were forebodings of judgment upon Israel if they should persist in their rebellion against God. God's word becomes dark to those who refuse to listen to it (See Romans 11:8-10).

What "Puffs Up"?

"Encounter" over Knowledge

In contrast to "knowledge" in Scripture which can make them arrogant and contentious, Johnson advocates that Christians should understand that when "revelation comes . . . it is intended to launch [them] into a divine encounter" that will humble them. (TPOH, 32) These revelation-encounters are meant to promote the discovery of "secrets" that then can be passed on as a legacy to future generations. These experiences become transformative and therefore superior to "knowledge," which he defines as knowledge of Scripture (Johnson cites John 5:39-40.). As Paul told the Corinthians, knowledge "puffs up." But divine encounters, whatever they are, make us "in less danger of pride," says Johnson. (TPOH, 33) To prove his point, Johnson alludes to (He does not quote.) 1 Corinthians 8:1, where Paul states:

Now concerning things offered to idols: We know (Greek, *oida*) that **we all have knowledge** (Greek, *gnosis*). **Knowledge** (*gnosis*) **puffs up**, but love edifies.
Emphasis added, 1 Corinthians 8:1, NKJV

Johnson then refers to Saul's conversion-encounter on the Damascus Road where he imagines the Apostle-to-be "was knocked off his donkey [i.e., humiliated] in his encounter with God." (TPOH, 33) But on this point, Johnson confuses Paul with the disobedient prophet Balaam (Numbers 22:22-35). Acts records that Saul was not riding a donkey but walking on the road to Damascus, and Numbers narrates that Balaam was not knocked off his donkey, but only that the belligerent animal wedged the legs of the riding prophet between the walls on the narrow trail and then "lay down under" him (Numbers 22:24-27). So after confusing and

conflating the biblical facts, Johnson diminishes the Scriptures Paul would write (2 Peter 3:15-16) as he surmises that Paul “didn’t strut away from the encounter boasting, ‘Wait till you see the books I’m about to write’.” (TPOH, 33) Thus when compared to “divine encounters” that revelation “launches us into,” Johnson reduces knowledge of the Scripture to be less valuable if not unimportant (*Contra* 2 Timothy 3:13-17.). So if Christians become too doctrinaire and their knowledge is not tempered by revelations stimulating encounters, Johnson judges them to be proud (thus including me and some of you, dears readers), contentious and divisive. [21] In a word, every Christian needs to be knocked off his donkey, even if he not riding one. Johnson’s revelations-launching-into-divine-encounters proposal may be summarized by the following logic:

- Knowledge of Scripture makes Christians proud and contentious.
- But divine encounters humble Christians.
- Therefore, Christians should seek divine encounters to cultivate humility.

But again, Johnson evidences a failure to connect the biblical dots, dots extant even in the Corinthian letter stating that “knowledge puffs up.” (Compare 1 Corinthians 8:1 to 1 Corinthians 4:6.)

Antidote to Arrogance

To alleviate the divisions in the Corinthian church, Paul stated how he and Apollos served “as curative examples of men under authority who did not go beyond what was written [and] obeyed the Word of God, not their own inclinations or worldly opinions.” [22] After declaring the sincerity of his ministry in light of his accountability to the Lord when He comes, Paul wrote:

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, **that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written**, that you may learn in us not to think (Greek, *phroneo*) beyond what is written (Greek, *grapho*), **that none of you may be puffed up** on behalf of one against the other. Emphasis added, 1 Corinthians 4:6, NKJV

The contrast between the example of Paul and Apollos contradicts what Bill Johnson teaches, that “encounter” humbles while “knowledge” arrogates. If the manner in which Johnson imports and adds meanings to Scripture give any indication, then Paul states that the distorters of, not the submitters to, what is written will become “puffed up.” [23] *The Point*. Revelation encounters will have, according to Paul, the opposite effect upon the soul from that Johnson envisions; extra-biblical revelations-encounters-experiences will not humble the receivers, but arrogate them (See 2 Corinthians 12:1 ff.).

“Not beyond what is written!”

The Apostle Paul (who “planted”) and the gifted Apollos (who “watered”) worked together in establishing the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 3:5-9). The genius of their cooperation lay in their mutual humility before “what was written.” Used commonly in the New Testament, the phrase “It is written . . .” denotes the authoritative, codified and official writings of the Old

Testament Canon of Scripture (e.g., Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; John 10:34; etc. and etc.). [24] Noted scholar F.F. Bruce (1910-1990) suggested that this phrase (“not to exceed what is written”) might be understood interjectionally to say, “Not beyond what is written!” The saying may have been “well known in the Corinthian church, where some were disposed to go beyond the gospel of Christ crucified and risen, which they had received ‘in accordance with the scriptures.’” [25] So Paul reminded the Corinthians against adding secular wisdom, Gnostic philosophy or anything else to the Gospel. “Keep the book!” he told them. [26] In an exemplary way and in a show of mutual humility and true unity, both Apollos and Paul submitted themselves “to what is written.” In the Scriptures they found common ground.

Of the Scriptures, John Stott (1921-2011) wrote:

The church is built on the New Testament Scriptures. They are the church’s foundation documents. And just as a foundation cannot be tampered with once it has been laid and the superstructure is being built upon it, so the New Testament foundation of the church is inviolable and cannot be changed by any additions, subtractions or modifications offered by teachers who claim to be apostles or prophets today. [27]

So the question arises, do experiences of encounters stimulated by receiving revelations exceed the boundaries of the Bible? If so, they are at core divisive. Then the question arises, encounter what? As exemplified in the Corinthian church, self-originated knowledge and experiences—something demons can take advantage of (1 Timothy 4:1)—perennially threaten the humility and unity of Christians.

Spiritual Swindling

Paul warned the Colossian Christians against the dangers of Greek philosophy, Jewish traditions, naturalistic science and folk religion which surrounded them; all of which could distract them from Christ (Colossians 2:8). In this chapter Paul also states that visions (which are “encounters”) “puff up” and swindle rewards from Christians. The various translations of Colossians 2, verse 18, evidence this.

Translations of Colossians 2:18

- Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those **things which he hath not seen** [divine encounters?], vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind . . . (KJV)
- Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on **visions** [divine encounters?] he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind . . . (NASB)
- Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about **visions** [divine encounters?], puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind . . . (ESV)
- Do not allow yourselves to be condemned by anyone who claims to be superior because of **special visions** [divine encounters?] and who insists on false humility and the worship of angels. (TEV)

Literally the Greek text informs Christian believers that they can be defrauded from their rewards by spiritual teachers (“Let no one disqualify you,” ESV) who “delve into things he has seen.” *The Net Bible* suggests that, “The idea in this context seems to be that the individual in question loves to talk on and on about his spiritual experiences, but in reality they [the experiences] are only coming out of his own sinful flesh.” [28] But not only will teachers claiming to experience supernatural visions and encounters become proud warns the Apostle, but they will also influence their followers to become “puffed up.” Two decades ago in their book *Strange Fire*, the van der Merwes, themselves Pentecostal, observed that elitist Charismatics possessed a “notorious reputation for riding roughshod over the Scriptures . . . in pursuit of extreme religious ideals.” [29] That trend continues.

Not Keeping the Book!

Yet in attempting to define “the legacy,” Johnson tells followers, “We’ve been given an inheritance of hundreds of years of mystics, of revivalists, of those who broke into realms of the Spirit to leave something as an inheritance,” then adds “and it needs to matter to someone.” (TPOH, 38) So it should be asked, does what Paul said “puffs up”—“going beyond what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6) and “going on in detail about [delving into] visions” (Colossians 2:18)—apply to Johnson’s advice to discover “the secret things” of mystics and revivalists to create a legacy to leave to future generations? Can encounters have the opposite affect upon Christians than what Johnson says they will have; that is, “puff” them up and make them proud? The Colossians text tells us this is the case. What puffs up is not knowledge *per se*. Paul and Apollos both possessed great knowledge but were humble before what was written. What arrogates human hearts is experiencing visions or encounters beyond the bounds of Scripture.

Conclusion

Johnson postulates that God has hidden secrets that after they are revealed, recovered and reclaimed in this generation, can then be passed on to and perpetuated by future generations. “It’s time” he says, “to start constructing in our thinking, in our planning and our prayers, a hundred-year vision.” (TPOH, 37) The secrets of “mystics, of revivalists, of those broke into realms of the Spirit” will serve to “jump start” the spirituality of future Christians when their legacy is passed on. (TPOH, 38) As stated in the chapter, *Recovering Our Spiritual Inheritance*, this is Bill Johnson’s theory.

So assuming (for the sake of argument only) that Johnson’s theory of discovering “hidden things” in the realms of government, science, business, education, media, entertainment and religion to pass on to future generations has validity, what’s the guarantee that future generations will value the inheritance any more than their forbearers valued theirs? (Ed. Again, *hidden* means *occult*.) If Israel and the Church provide examples, they won’t.

Israel’s Legacy

The Jews possessed a legacy called the Law. On behalf of Yahweh, Moses told the generations of Israel to keep it (Deuteronomy 6:1-25).

These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and

when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; 4:9; 11:14).

But as predicted in Deuteronomy and recorded in the rest of the Old Testament (the historical as well as prophetic books), the history of Israel indicates that the nation squandered the inheritance God gave/revealed to them through Moses (Deuteronomy 29:22-28; 2 Kings 17:9-23; Psalm 78:1-72; Daniel 9:11). So the idea that the next generation will appreciate any legacy this generation might leave them is a myth. "God has no grandchildren," as has been popularly said.

The Church's Legacy

Christians too have a legacy; the teachings of the New Covenant. Jude calls our inheritance "the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3). Elsewhere it's called the "apostles' doctrine [or teaching]" (Acts 2:42). Paul told Timothy to pass the legacy on. "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses," he wrote, "entrust [Greek, *paratithemi*] these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). In other words, treat the teachings like a savings account to pass on as an inheritance to future generations! Where would any of us be today if we did not have the legacy the Lord's Disciple/Apostles left to us? (See John 17:20.) All Christians have been charged to keep this legacy during these latter days, the time period between Jesus' two comings when mockers will heap scorn and ridicule upon God's words spoken by the Apostles (2 Timothy 3:13-4:5; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 3:3.).

But you, beloved, ought to **remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ**, that they were saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts".

Emphasis added, Jude 17-18

It can be noted how within a year or two, the Galatians were having difficulty keeping the legacy the Apostle Paul left them. "I am so amazed" he wrote, "that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another" (Galatians 1:6-7a). **[30]** Study of the early church fathers indicates how in the era of church history closest to the Apostles, the Gospel of Grace became compromised. **[31]** History is littered with nations (including Israel) that fell because future generations squandered the legacy (the values, traditions and sacrifices) their forbearers made for and left to them. So what is it that Johnson thinks he can discover to change the disintegration dynamic? In light of this statement, "We've never fully seen what a spiritual 'jump start' can mean to the next generation," it must be asked, is not "new birth" as stated by Jesus (e.g., regeneration), or was not Pentecost a "jump start"? (John 3:3, 7; Acts 2:1-4) I guess not, at least according to Johnson.

Further, does seeking after a new legacy suggest that the biblical legacy is not good enough? Are we going to assume that the "revelation-encounters" experienced by this generation are to be valued above the "teachings" Jesus and His Apostles left for us? (Matthew 28:19-20) As

F.F. Bruce said, “Steadfast adherence to the apostles’ teaching . . . is the best evidence of being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” [32]

A theologian once observed that heresy arises from either adding to or subtracting from Scripture, either the Bible plus or the Bible minus. In developing this chapter’s theme (about reclaiming a spiritual legacy sequestered in “secrets” belonging to God), it can be observed that Johnson’s emphasis upon “revelation-encounters” denies the sufficiency of Scripture (the Bible plus) even as his pre-texting (i.e., switching verses around and contorting their meanings) denies the plain sense of Scripture (the Bible minus). Johnson’s fanciful interpretive antics, as evidenced in his chapter in *The Physics of Heaven*, resemble the method of the false teachers (“untaught and unstable”) who the Apostle Peter warned will “distort” (i.e., “wrest,” KJV; “twist,” NKJV; “explain falsely,” TEV) the plain meaning of Scripture, and sadly to both their “destruction” and those who follow them (2 Peter 3:16). [33] So Christians beware: *other* legacies become *other* gospels!

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased— and **we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him** on the holy mountain. So **we have the prophetic word made more sure**, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.
Emphasis added, 2 Peter 1:16-19

TO BE CONTINUED

Endnotes

- [1] Bill Johnson, Chapter 4: “Recovering Our Spiritual Inheritance,” *The Physics of Heaven: Exploring God’s Mysteries of Sound, Light, Energy, Vibrations and Quantum Physics*, by Judy Franklin & Ellyn Davis (Crossville, TN: Double Portion Publishing, 2012): 29-39.
- [2] I do not argue with such a scenario as, for example, we see this generation’s indifference to the Federal Constitution, and what that portends for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren’s freedom.
- [3] By my count, the word “inheritance(s)” is used 25 times and “generation(s)” 29.
- [4] Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, 1995).
- [5] Johnson states, “It’s the glory of God to conceal a matter; it’s the glory of kings to search it out.” (Again, Johnson alludes to but does not provide the reference of Proverbs 25:2. Compare Revelation 5:9-10.), and since Peter designates Christians to be a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), Johnson teaches that believers “have legal access to hidden things . . . to pursue the unlocking of those mysteries.” (TPOH, 31) The problem with Johnson’s interpretation is that believers are king-priests *not for pursuing* “secrets, hidden things or mysteries,” *but for proclaiming* the Excellencies of God! (See 1 Peter 2:9.)
- [6] As he introduces Deuteronomy 29:29, Johnson says that, “Proverbs says that a righteous

man leaves an inheritance to his children's children." (**TPOH**, 31) *First*, the author does not properly cite the location of this verse in Proverbs which is chapter 13, verse 22. *Second*, unlike Johnson's free rendering of "righteous man," reliable versions unanimously translate it "A good man . . ." (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, etc.). The Hebrew word for "good" (*towb*) does not carry the meaning of "righteous" (the Hebrew word, *tsadaq*). And *third*, as defined by the following parallel phrase ("But the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous," NKJV), the inheritance is not spiritual, but material. Again, the speaker/author confuses words of Scripture to import his meaning into the text (2 Peter 3:16b). But the author yet demonstrates another example of text tampering. He stated that "Paul was knocked off his donkey in his encounter with God." (**TPOH**, 33) Though the disobedient prophet Balaam was riding a donkey when he encountered the Lord (which caused the belligerent donkey to "lay down under Balaam," Numbers 22:27), the narratives of Paul's conversion (Acts 9:1 ff.; 22:1 ff.) record that while Paul "fell to the ground," they do not record he was riding a donkey. Then telepathic-like, Johnson reads Paul's mind (the Apostle didn't strut away boasting, "Wait till you see the books I'm about to write!") and assesses that revelation must involve "divine encounter" because doctrine minus encounter will only stroke the folks as they "strut" and "boast" of their knowledge. Johnson does not suggest that "encounters" minus the restraint of truth can, as happened with the false teachers at Corinth, lead people to arrogate that they are apostles when they are not (2 Corinthians 11:12-15, 18; 12:1-6). What can be more arrogant, I ask, than to make the claim that one is an Apostle-Prophet when in fact, one is not? (See Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29a.) We might also note that Paul wrote, "Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 12:1).

[7] Thompson affirms that, "The secrets are "things beyond man's knowledge, such as the future, are God's concern." See J.A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (London, GB: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974): 284.

[8] Emphasis added, J.G. McConville, *Deuteronomy: Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002): 419.

[9] It might be replied that because Jesus is the Jehovah of the Old Testament (John 12:41), that Jesus spoke these words. But the entire chapter of Deuteronomy records the prophetic words Moses spoke to Israel ("These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel," Deuteronomy 29:1). Furthermore, verse 29 records Moses' reflection upon his personal identification with the nation and their responsibility to "observe all the words of this law" that had been revealed through him to them (Deuteronomy 29:29b).

[10] See Larry DeBruyn, "Deliteralizing the Bible, From Plato to Peterson: Scripture amidst the Shadows," *Guarding His Flock Ministries*, January 3, 2012 (<http://guardinghisflock.com/2012/03/01/deliteralizing-the-bible-from-plato-to-peterson/#more-2038>). The literalness of the Bible, the "smallest letter or stroke" of the Law as Jesus referenced it (Matthew 5:18), is being attacked from different angles by professing evangelicals today. First, like Johnson, they advocate that God's ultimate revelation resides in secrets (parables, symbols and dark sayings) which need to be explored and unlocked. Second, like Eugene Peterson, they assert that God's revelation comes to us in experiences that can only be explained in metaphors. And third, like Chuck Missler and other post modern prophets, the Bible consists of codes to be deciphered via mathematics or consulting ancient extra-biblical sources. The common thread with these various approaches to Scripture is that they promote an esoteric (the divine is hidden), mystic (the divine is feeling) and relativistic (the divine is various) spirituality which denies the One

Way, One Word, One Witness to the One God in the Holy Scripture. In the modern evangelical view, spirituality has become intrinsic within every human soul and not extrinsic with God and as such, is humanism. Spirituality becomes subjective to everybody and objective to nobody. As the crafty serpent asked, "Indeed, has God said . . .?" (Genesis 3:1)

[11] Rosemary Ellen Guiley, "Symbol," *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical & Paranormal Experience* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991): 593-595.

[12] The biblical meaning of the word mystery does not carry the normal meaning of the English word. As Vine defines it, "In the ordinary sense a mystery implies knowledge withheld; its Scriptural significance is truth revealed." See W.E. Vine, "MYSTERY," *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, by W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984): 769. In other words, in the New Testament "mystery" refers to truth revealed while the English word denotes truth concealed. Johnson's theory makes necessary the importation of the non-biblical meaning of the word mystery into the Bible.

[13] G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, Editors, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2007): 46.

[14] Guiley, "Symbol": 594.

[15] Ibid: 595.

[16] Relevant to this point one can note the role sacraments, statutes and symbols (i.e., hand the tradition down) play in Christendom (e.g., the Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism). Johnson's modus operandi is not unlike what these religions attempt to do; and that is, ritualistically and mechanically (sacraments and signs), beatifically (statutes, symbols, sounds and smells) and catechistically (study) perpetuate their legacies unto future generations.

[17] Francis Brown, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979): 295.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Joseph Addison Alexander, D.D., *The Psalms: Translated and Explained* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975 reprint of 1873 edition): 327.

[20] Michael Wilcox, *The Message of Psalms 73-150: Songs for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001): 26.

[21] In 1 Corinthians 1:8, in addition to stating that, "Knowledge makes arrogant," Paul also wrote "we know that we all have knowledge." Using Johnson's equation that "knowledge puffs up," then that must mean we're all puffed because we all have knowledge. This assessment may be closer to the truth than any of us might like to admit.

[22] David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* by Dallas Seminary Faculty, New Testament, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Editors (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983): 512.

[23] The verb "puff up" (Greek, *phusioo*) is used several times by Paul in his letters, mostly in the first Corinthian letter which congregation ironically was, to Johnson's point that encounters humble, arrogant and divided for among other reasons, confusion over spiritual gifts and claims supernatural experiences among its members! (See 1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40; *1:10-11; 13:4.)

[24] The verb "written" (Greek, *grapho*) "is used of Scripture as a standing authority." See Vine, "WRITE, WROTE, WRITTEN," *Expository Dictionary*: 1252.

[25] F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London, ENG: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, LTD., 1971): 48-49.

[26] Ibid: 48.

[27] John R.W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL:

InterVarsity Press.1979): 107.

[28] *NET BIBLE: New English Translation*, Second Beta Edition (Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C., 2003): 2163, Translator Note #16.

[29] Travers and Jewel van der Merwe, Chapter 5: "The 'Elite' Concept," *Strange Fire: The Rise of Gnosticism in the Church* (Discernment-Ministries, Inc., 1995): 29. (<http://www.discernment-ministries.org/StrangeFire.pdf>)

[30] Likely, the Paul established the Galatian churches on His First Missionary Journey (46-47 AD) and wrote the Epistle by that name to them in 48 AD. Obviously, the Gospel legacy did not last. But we can thank God that—as witnessed to by the Spirit and the Scriptures—we still possess the testimony to this legacy!

[31] Excepting a few statements by a couple of church fathers, Hannah writes that "there is no synthesis of the teaching of the relationship of humankind's sin to the reception of God's unmerited favor in Christ." See John D. Hannah, *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001): 205. In reading the Apostle John's letter to the seven churches (Revelation 2:1-3:22), the deterioration is also noticeable. Legacies are often not appreciated.

[32] F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Verse-by-Verse Exposition* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1961): 57.

[33] At first glance I know that readers might (some I know will) take this conclusion to be too harsh. Yet the word "distort" (Greek, *strebloo*, "wrest," KJV, "twist," NKJV) is used of "one who wrests or tortures language in a false sense." See James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Woodside, Ontario, CAN: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996): #4761. One cannot read this chapter *Recovering Our Spiritual Inheritance* without noting how the speaker weaves random Bible verses together and then assigns off-the-wall interpretations to them to support his theory. This forces the assessment that Bill Johnson is a Scripture twister who wrecks the meaning of the Bible. As one who has spent four and one-half decades studying the Bible and in pastoral ministry, this conclusion is a sad one for me to make. I could wish it was different. But it is what it is.