

EARNESTLY CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH – Aug. 2026

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NO PLACE FOR PAIN AND SUFFERING?

Bill Johnson is the hyper-charismatic pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, California. Bill lives in a “make-believe world” that has no basis in sound theology or reality. The motto for Bill’s ministry is, “*On earth as it is in Heaven.*” Bill says, “The ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ must take on literal application if we’re to have the effect of salt on the world around us that God intended.” (“The Way of Life” – p. 32) Again, he says, “Simply put, there is no sickness there, so there is to be none here. There is no torment or sin in Heaven, so there is to be none here.” (p. 21) So says the man who wears glasses, his son is mostly deaf, and his wife died of cancer.

Bill (in his head) lives in a world where signs and wonders are normative, where we already live in the kingdom, where apostles are again with us (he being one), and where, through one supernatural “breakthrough” after another, Christians are bringing heaven to earth! Just one problem! None of this is true! Grossly missing in Bill’s teaching is a BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING! His is a “kingdom NOW theology” that bypasses the way of the CROSS!

Paul wrote Second Corinthians to refute “false apostles” who were making inroads into the church at Corinth. These false apostles had a “kingdom now” theology that berated Paul for his weakness, saying, “his bodily presence is weak” (2 Cor. 10:10). In 1 Corinthians 4:8, Paul sarcastically chided the Corinthians, “You have reigned as kings without us – and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you.” Yes, we all want to reign and look forward to “kingdom realities,” but it is not true yet!

Paul, in writing 2 Corinthians, at great length shows that the reality of his apostleship was proven through perseverance in hardship. Yes, the “signs and wonders” of a true apostle accompanied his ministry, but the very FIRST thing he stressed was that “the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance.” (12:12) This was contrary to the supposed “super-apostles” and their “prosperity gospel!”

Paul discovered the truth that in his weakness, in his sufferings, the power of Christ rested on him (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9). That’s why he linked the power of Christ’s resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings in Philippians 3:10. It’s in suffering that the power of God’s grace is uniquely put on display. This is a KEY missing element in Bill Johnson’s theology! And it was totally foreign and counter to the false teachers. They were all about power, prosperity, and outward show, as are the false teachers of our day. The false teachers in effect said, “*Show me your swagger, your power, and your prosperity. That’s the mark of genuineness.*” Paul, in effect, said, “*Show me your humility, your suffering, your persecution, and perseverance. This is the mark of genuineness.*” (cf. Acts 9:14; 14:22; 2 Cor. 1:4-11; 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:23-20; 12:7-12; Mt. 5:10-12).

Paul was given a PAINFUL thorn in the flesh to keep him humble, and in this he learned that the power of Christ was revealed in his weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Power in weakness is like a thread that runs through the whole letter, climaxing right here. **This is the high point of the letter.** This is a sound rebuff to the proud, self-made prosperity gospel teaching false apostles who were all about their own eloquence, their own power, and outward appearance. Paul came to where he took “pleasure in infirmities [weaknesses/frailties], in reproaches [insults], in needs [hardship/privation], in persecutions [abuse/mistreatment], in distresses [pressures/duresses]” (12:10). Paul’s opponents were not impressed with this resume of weakness (cf. 10:10). They considered such experiences to be evidence that God was not with him. Yet Paul, in effect, says that they missed the point! It’s all about the SUFFICIENCY of God, which is demonstrated in and through human WEAKNESS! “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (12:10) For Paul, it was all about the inward man. As he said, “though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” (2 Cor. 4:16).

James says to count it all joy when we fall into various trials because God uses these things to build us (Ja. 1:2-4, cf. Rom. 5:3-5). Peter tells those who “suffer according to the will of God” to commit their souls to God “in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.” (1 Pet. 4:19). This is very hard to reconcile with radical “kingdom now” teaching. It is foreign to the emphasis of Bill Johnson’s teaching! But it is very BIBLICAL!

Thot: Revelation 21:4 says that in eternity there will be no more tears, death, sorrow, crying, or pain, for the former things will have passed away. But that which will be FORMER in eternity is still now PRESENT. To claim otherwise is indicative of false teachers and false apostles who wrongly divide the word of truth (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15).

Earnestly Contending, Pastor Dwight J. Oswald