

## **A Letter of Caution**

by Tricia Berg

I would like to share a message I wrote to a brother in Christ who is considering attending Bethel School of Spiritual Ministry. My first message was quite short and to the point. This is my reply to his detailed response about how he had already researched them and felt that the criticisms against them were unwarranted.

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Thanks for your thoughtful reply. I will pray for you and appreciate your prayers for me as well. I would like to clarify that I do not base my understanding of Bethel's problematic issues on YouTube. I warn people often about the false "prophets" with their channels telling people that every single dream they dream is a prophecy from God. (Jeremiah 23) One of the hallmarks of those on YouTube is that they continually receive "confirmation" from one another or from coincidences (like "just then I saw a bird fly by..."), whereas we are to get our "confirmation" from the Word of God and from God Himself—if what was said actually turns out to be true, and He was the only One who revealed it to us. (Ezekiel 33:33) There is NO instance in the Bible where a prophet was to consult another for "confirmation."

I am well aware that there are a multitude of false teachings on YouTube as well, both leaning towards keeping the law to be saved and towards using grace as a license to sin. I believe that when Jesus told us to walk the narrow path, it is meant to be between those two extremes. We obey because we love Him and because of His Spirit within us producing fruit. I also agree with you that we are not called to tear our brothers and sisters down, but to build them up (but this doesn't include supporting, or even remaining in fellowship with them if they attempt to deceive and lead others astray. 1 Corinthians 5:6-13, 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, 1 Corinthians 11:1-4, 1 Corinthians 15:33-34, Galatians 6:7-8, James 1:12-16, Ephesians 5:1-12, 1 John 3:7)

The "gold dust" phenomenon was from Bethel's own member video and I saw at least one other video defending it against skepticism. There was a comment by a viewer on one of the videos claiming that the same thing happened in another church and they scooped it up and paid off the church mortgage. (I find this beyond doubtful, and in addition, I do not find it biblical that we should go into massive debt in order to have a place to gather for worship...) I do not believe this is the Shekinah glory of God. There is no mention of gold dust in 2

Chronicles 7:1-3 or Revelation 15:8. We need to compare what is being claimed with the Word of God, not succumb to the emotions of the atmosphere.

Speaking of which, there have been many who pointed out the doctrine in much of Bethel's music is getting to be questionable, and the style is more of a performance than worship. God desires to be worshiped through a life of obedience, not only in outward, emotional shows of devotion. (John 14:15-24, John 15:8-14, Hebrews 12:1) Worship is about HIM, not us, but so many songs (and church teachings) these days are focused on *us* and *our wants and perceived needs*. (See more on this in the last paragraph. I'm not saying it's wrong to seek healing or other help, but that shouldn't be ALL or even the MAIN thing we want of God.)

My comment about the children's materials stems from looking at their own promotion of them. They have four statements ("most important things") that they teach children (along with unbiblical practices like visualizing Jesus? Where do we find any encouragement to imagine in our minds what He looks like?) The first two statements, "I am important" and "God is in a good mood" are NOT in the Bible, but appeal to today's self-centered mindset. God does love children, there is no doubt—but the fact that He hates sin and disapproves of His children embracing it does not mean He is not loving. We shouldn't feed children just the "dessert" without the main course, or they will have an incomplete understanding and will not mature. (1 Corinthians 3:1-2) The third statement, "Jesus' blood paid for everything," with no mention of repentance, or even receiving Him as Lord as all, also tickles the ear. How can that make sense to children that Jesus had to die for our sin if God has now decided that it's fine and we needn't be concerned about avoiding it, since it's all paid for? (1 John 1:5-10)

Their last "declaration" (positive declarations/affirmations are new age), "nothing is impossible with God," is often taken as a stand-alone quote (and it is certainly true), but this actually is a quote from Jeremiah 32:27. God has instructed Jeremiah to buy a field, which I believe symbolically represents the deed to the promised land. It would seem to be the same deed that Jesus is breaking the seals on in Revelation 5-6, because ONLY He can redeem that property and lead the people into it. (See also Ruth 3-4 as well as Joshua 1-5, Hebrews 4, Luke 4:14-30, Isaiah 61, and Leviticus 25:8-34.) One of the many ways in which Jesus is referred to in the Bible is "Shiloh," which means "He to Whom it belongs" or "He whose it is." (Gen. 49:10) (The scroll in Ezekiel 2-3, which also has writing on both sides, appears to be the same one in Revelation 10-11. The two tablets in Exodus 32:15 were also written on both sides. Neither of those instances refers to them as being sealed, however.) In the context of

Matthew 19:16-30, Jesus was discussing how NO ONE could be saved apart from the miraculous working of God. Jesus had just told the rich man to sell everything and follow Him. He goes on after this to talk about how great will be the reward in heaven for those who leave everything for His sake. (Luke 12:32-48, Luke 14:33)

These statements that Bethel is encouraging the children to recite aloud amount to "It's all about me, and everyone goes to heaven." That is a far cry from the instructions in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Deuteronomy 11:18-32. They seem to think that telling children that God does not approve of sin would hurt them in some way, but that is not what the Bible says, for example, in Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 23:12-14, Proverbs 19:18 and Proverbs 29:15-18. What is happening in today's society is described in Isaiah 3.

Have you heard of Lighthouse Trails, which serves as a "watchman on the wall" warning of false teachings pervading the Church? Here is the link to a page about Bethel:

<https://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/blog/?p=15508> I strongly disapprove of "witch hunts" inside the Church, and I do take to heart Paul's instructions to "take care lest we devour one another" (Galatians 5:15), as well as Jesus' prayer for our unity. (John 17:20-26) However, these are perilous times that we live in. Everything we were warned about in 2 Timothy 3:1-7 has come to pass.

I'm not trying to argue with you or accuse everyone at Bethel of making false claims, but I would like you to consider a secular scenario that has similarities to those who have sounded an alarm after leaving Bethel. If an employee leaves a job because the employer is committing fraud and they want no part of it, the employer always blames the employee who has left for the problem. The remaining employees no doubt believe it when they are told that the one who left was a "bad apple." Large churches these days are run very much like businesses.

I do not want to discourage you from pursuing your ministry with a whole heart and expecting miracles, or to take my advice over what you feel God would have you do based on your prayers to Him for guidance. However, I would like to encourage you to remember that God Himself is your Teacher. The apostles were taught personally by Jesus and what they learned is recorded for us to learn from as well, with the Helper to guide us.

*I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that*

*anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. 1 John 2:26-29*

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. John 14:26*

*But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Matthew 23:8-12*

If you continue with your plans to attend BSSM, please compare everything you are taught with the Bible, not blindly trusting that they haven't twisted anything to make it look harmonious, without verifying it YOURSELF, IN CONTEXT, etc. One example we hear often is "by His stripes we are healed" being applied to *physical* healing, whereas we are healed *spiritually* because of Jesus' suffering on our behalf. If it were meant to refer to physical healing in that particular verse, then all believers would instantly be healed of all physical ailments upon the moment they believe—but our bodies are mere tents and our hope is in the life that comes after this one. (2 Corinthians 5:1-10, 2 Peter 1:12-14, 2 Corinthians 12:5-10) I'm not saying God can't or won't heal, but that we are to seek Him first, for Himself, because of who He is and what He has done. Paul said if we judged ourselves rightly, we wouldn't need to be judged by Jesus (disciplined, which sometimes includes sickness or even physical death) in order to avoid being condemned along with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32, Hebrews 6, Rev. 3:19, 1 Peter 5:8-11, Rev. 12:10-12)

I do not approve of schools like the one Bethel runs, or for another example, the one run by Andrew Wommack. I am not even sure about the many seminaries teaching such varied doctrines from one another, holding up their own founders as "celebrities of the faith," and refusing fellowship with anyone who disagrees with them on fine points. (2 Timothy 2:14) We don't like to consider this possibility among those we consider brothers, but the Bible warns that many will peddle the Word of God for a profit in the last days and that false prophets will invade the Church. (2 Corinthians 2:17, 1 Thessalonians 2:5, Jude

1:11, 1 Peter 5, Matthew 7:15-23, Acts 20:26-33, 2 Peter 2) As for being the one to help them correct their errors, be careful lest you slip. (1 Corinthians 10:12, Galatians 6:1)

I apologize for the length of this response. I just wanted you to know that my message to you didn't stem from a hasty, misplaced judgment of Bethel based on the opinions of others who are against the faith or are disgruntled. Please bear in mind that cults such as Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses always have the attitude that "it's us against them." They are trained to be suspicious of those who try to lovingly correct their doctrinal errors. (Proverbs 9:8, Proverbs 25:12, Ecclesiastes 7:5, Ephesians 4:11-25, 2 Timothy 2:22-26) Given the light shed above on Bethel's new age "declarations" in the children's ministry (and during the weekly offerings), I believe these Scriptures apply:

*Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all. 1 Timothy 6:20-21*

*If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Timothy 4:6-16*

If Bethel continues in the direction it is headed (seeker sensitive, which tends toward watering down truth, or just avoiding the discussion of controversial topics, to make sinners more comfortable, and using worldly methods to reach out to people), then more obvious false teachings will result over time (such as approval of homosexuality). (Romans 1:18-32) For the time being, it does appear that they have rejected the false claim that God approves of

homosexuality, and have not swept the issue under the rug. That is definitely in their favor (and hopefully there are many more things they do well), as that has been a common stumbling block for the Church in these present times.

Whatever you decide to do in the end, I pray that you are able to stay on the narrow path. You are completely right that mercy triumphs judgment—I agree there is no room for hatred of anyone—but today’s culture often feels that truth equals hate. So the narrow door we must enter is the one that doesn’t say God hates sinners OR God loves sin; and says ONLY Jesus saves. (John 14:6) It is not loving or merciful to preach only about God’s love and let people think that there will be no penalty in this life or the next for anything they do. If that were the definition of love and mercy, then there would not be so many exhortations in the rest of the Bible to pursue a life of holiness. (Hebrews 12:14, 1 Thessalonians 4:7, 2 Timothy 3:12-13, Matthew 5:10, Revelation 21:7-8, Revelation 22:12-15, Revelation 3:3-6) (The list, which applies to believers, could go on and on.)

Ananias and Sapphira are good examples that God does still see and care about His children’s behavior, but I suppose that someone arguing fine points would insist it was only that one particular sin that God “saw” and punished. (Acts 5:1-11) In that case, I would refer them to 1 Corinthians 11:27-32, as well as Titus 3:8-11, 2 Timothy 2:19 and Hebrews 12:11. I know that you said Bethel does preach repentance. Hopefully that is true so that the result is changed lives from the inside out. (1 John 2:28-29, Romans 12:1-2, Romans 6) Positive “declarations” are not what produces change, and they were not prescribed in the Bible for either children or adults. (See the link to the chart below.) People who approach God with only or mainly the hopes of receiving worldly blessings have missed the point. (Matthew 6:19-34, 1 Peter 1:3-9) If I didn’t think you knew that and that your ministry is out of concern for lost souls, then I wouldn’t even know where to begin. But I do believe you know the truth, and so this is where I will end.

Added 11-18-17:

There is so much reason for concern about the declarations being used by Bethel Church, both with the children's ministry and the offering declarations, that I decided to make a chart to compare them with the teachings of the Bible. I do not want to judge my brothers and sisters in matters of freedom, “before the time.” (Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 4:3-5) However, I haven’t condemned any individual. I have only compared the practices to the truth of the Bible. (1 Timothy 4:16)

*Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Timothy 4:16*

You may download the chart here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H06\\_1FxkkZkeFjgdbN2YTouxhUnS3nIP/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H06_1FxkkZkeFjgdbN2YTouxhUnS3nIP/view?usp=sharing)

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