

# *An Open Letter to BURNELL JOHNSON*

**From Jack W. Langford**

Dear Burnell, greetings in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We had an interesting meeting on the evening of 10/4/07. We certainly covered a lot of past history as well as bringing ourselves up to the *present reality* and all was done in a very cordial manner. Of course, I reminded you that though we shook hands as old friends, I was looking forward to the day when our mutual handshake would be “the right hand of fellowship” and you agreed.

My purpose in this letter is to attempt to make my assessment of the situation as clear as possible to you. In a primary way I believe it is only the Spirit of God Who can sort out much of the confusion that has resulted in the last 20 or more years. It behooves us to be submissive to His guiding us through the Word of God. The bewildering array of accusations and misconceptions is enough to leave any sane person in a dilemma for sure. Yet, it is my desire—as one who has inherited a lot of truth from your own father and many others also—to make this endeavor and to be responsible for conveying to you, and for the sake of many others as well, a spiritually correct and Christ honoring assessment.

Let me also say at the outset that I regard you as royalty in comparison to my own upbringing and family origins. When I look at what I know of your grandfather and great grandfather, and all that they came out of, and of the many battles they had with the religious world, and then of what I know personally about your own father, I can only have deep respect and admiration for the family you have been privileged to be born into. However, I hope this will not offend you, but I am claiming Wilbur as my dad, also. So scoot over. At least, if not the most important, I (and you as well) have a spiritual connection that is very profound and dear to me. As I explained in our meeting Christ showed the beauty of new family relationships among all those who put their trust in Him. “And he stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother’” (Mark 3:31-35). I will always thank God that brother Wilbur was a father to me at a time when I was a very confused young man. And I want to add that the same was true of my wife, Jean Currier, at that time. Back in 1954 she came out of the Baptist organization and saw the truth about the body of Christ and realized the awful confusion of denominationalism through the ministry of Maurice Johnson and Wilbur Johnson. Wilbur had her and others in his home after many Sunday morning meetings and explained the Word of God. She said she didn’t understand all that he was talking about, but she sure understood his father’s heart and his desire to shepherd in a beautiful and wholesome way some of God’s children.

## *THE BEGINNING*

I told you that I had very strong emotional feelings about even having a meeting with you. That was not merely because of the existing division between us, but primarily because when I see you I think of your father, Brother Wilbur Johnson. Were it not for

the clear love and persistence that man showed to me back in 1952 I would never have come to know any of the saints I have stood with for the last 50 or more years.

Ironic as it may seem, this meeting we had brought back a remembrance of the first meetings I had with your father. As you remember, I explained that the very first meeting I ever came to was on a Tuesday evening in the fall (probably in October) of 1952, in the upstairs room of the Ceramic Decorating Co. located in a dusty, dark part of the East Los Angeles industrial area. My two buddies from the Bible Institute of Los Angeles were pulling on my arm to get us out of there after hearing Maurice Johnson speak. Your father, Wilbur Johnson, stood at the head of the stairs and said “Won’t you please come back? I would love to talk with you and share some truths to help you.” My buddies, in a rude manner said, “No, we are not interested.” But I saw and was moved by the love and sincere interest Wilbur manifested, and I said within myself, “I’ll be back!” And I did come back and had many discussions, and some disputations in a very wholesome manner, with Wilbur Johnson.

### *THE CONFRONTATION*

The reasons I had these “confrontations” primarily with Wilbur is because I challenged him on most everything he gave to me. And the amazing thing to me was that he wanted me to challenge what he gave and prove it right or wrong. Obviously, in the process of time, I proved him right.

The reason I had to challenge Wilbur Johnson and Maurice Johnson was because I was already in the biggest, most prosperous, “God-blessed” organization I knew of on planet earth. That was the grandiose “Church of the Open Door,” right square in the middle of downtown Los Angeles. It had over 10,000 membership, and an auditorium that sat 4,000 people, and the increasingly famous J. Vernon McGee expounding the Word of God. In addition they had missionaries all over the world preaching the gospel to the lost. In fact there was not a Sunday that went by in their church services that lost souls were not saved. With its adjoining “Bible Institute of Los Angeles” young people could study the Word of God. I thought I had found God’s paradise, having already come out of the cold, liberal, sterile Methodists. At that time this grandiose organization had become a member of the “Independent Fundamental Churches of America.” Later it dropped the long name for the simpler “Bible Church” movement out of Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas where McGee had graduated. There was no way I was going to surrender all this—and accept a little scrawny group of troublemakers, who met in a back street rented auditorium—without a challenge!

### *WHY WAS I EVEN OPEN TO DISCUSSION?*

Some may wonder why I would even entertain the thought of leaving the fellowship of the fabulous “Church of the Open Door” and “Bible Institute of Los Angeles” for what appeared to be, and was accused of being, nothing more than a rabid cult of fanatical “come-outers.” Likewise I have sometimes thought about the fact that my two buddies would not even want to stay and talk to “those people.” I didn’t mind talking to those people at all. In fact, I thought what was said by Maurice Johnson was only the truth. “Let’s get out of here,” they kept saying to me. Why was it I was open to discussion but my buddies (both Baptists) were not?

Well, let me remind you of what I told you was the reason. It was because I had already been shocked shortly after I was saved by reading the Bible accounts of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, Paul, Peter, Jude, and many of the Prophets of old. In my religious upbringing I had understood that these ministers, even Jesus Christ Himself, were like the sweet genteel “men of the cloth” of our own day who just loved everybody and everybody loved them. In the reality of the Biblical account that I read they were nothing of the sort! The world looked upon every one of them as “troublemakers.” This was especially true of the religious world.

John the Baptist scalded the religious leaders of his day—“You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee the wrath to come?” I was shocked when I first read John’s words, because I had seen a “brood of vipers” and it was a sight I’ll never forget. It scared me for sure—and now John says that about these clerics! I could hardly believe it. Would our modern religious world allow John the Baptist to come into their churches and preach? I doubt it very much!

As I recounted to you the night of our meeting, I said that Christ was crucified, humanly speaking, precisely because of His continuous exposure of the hypocrisy of the religious leadership. If the language of John was scalding, the language of Christ was even more severe—“Serpents, you brood of vipers, whited sepulchers, wolves in sheep’s clothing, woe unto you hypocrites, fools and blind, etc., etc., etc.” In addition, vast crowds of people eventually stopped following Christ because of the hard things He was saying, especially against the religious hypocrisy of His day. And Christ warned His apostles, “*The Servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have hated me they will hate you!*” I learned from this that the whole conflict in the world today is first of all a conflict in religion and against religious hypocrisy and compromise which was sabotaging the plain teaching of the Word of God. Therefore I should never expect Christ’s ministers to be sweet, genteel, positive Bible teachers who are loved by everybody and hated by no one.

Christ’s own apostles were persecuted severely as well. Peter was threatened, beaten and miraculously escaped death (at least temporarily). Stephen was stoned to death. The Apostle Paul was internationally known all right, but as a “*troublemaker, ring-leader, a pestilent fellow and one who turned the world ‘upside down.’*” Most of the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures were likewise usually testifying for God in such a way that as a consequence they were standing totally alone, and in prison, or put to death.

### *HOUSE CLEANING*

Therefore, when I heard the truths that Maurice Johnson and Wilbur Johnson ministered, about true Christianity, against sectarianism, man-made religion, ritualism, the pagan holidays, clerical titles, worldliness and on the subject of modesty—indeed, on the whole consistent package of “separation unto Jesus Christ,” I eventually saw that they were right on every issue! I saw that these men were willing to W-A-L-K in the truth of these issues and not just “talk” them. They were not merely preaching the truth; they were walking in the truth! As Brother H. G. Ross explained to me, that fact primarily is what made the compromising Fundamentalists deeply bitter against Maurice Johnson. They could not take his exposure because they were not walking consistently. Maurice Johnson was only house cleaning—returning to original Christianity.

When one reads the history of Israel in the Bible he will constantly be faced with the reality of the departure of Israel from God's designed guidance and household economy for that period of time. The account of the several Kings that did "house cleaning" is a good illustration. Though it happened on several occasions the example of king Josiah is most obvious. In his youth he came to love God and desire to serve Him. As a result he saw confusion in the land of Israel and many pollutions which he began to clean out (II Chron. 34). The Scriptures were discovered in the Temple in the cleaning process and when they read the Scriptures to him he tore his clothes in anguish because of Israel's disobedience and apostasy. He purposed in his heart to serve God with all his heart. On the one hand they rebuilt in many areas where the Temple needed refurbishing and on the other hand they destroyed and disposed of all kinds of pollutions. Consequently, there followed a tremendous house cleaning operation in Israel which spared no area. What an amazing example for us in the church today!

Furthermore I had already seen the apostasy of the Methodists where they rejected the Deity of Christ, His virgin birth, the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and many other things. As a result I escaped from that religious spider web that had me temporarily ensnared and confounded. My two buddies from the Bible Institute never had that experience. Furthermore, the presence of many dear saints in the Fundamentalist and Baptist organizations sanctified those organizations and everything they did in their eyes. My eyes were opened by my battle with the Methodists and now they were opened further to the compromises in the Fundamentalists.

#### *MAKING A CHOICE*

Therefore I had to make a choice! Did I want the fame and prosperity of the compromising Fundamentalists who would not allow "controversial" issues to be spoken on; who, though they did not consider themselves a denomination, would have sweet fellowship with those in all denominations; who, though they knew about the pagan origin of the religious holidays would nevertheless overlook it; who wouldn't upset any fellowship simply because of the physical ordinances; and who would most certainly gag themselves on the issues of modesty and worldliness so that they would not appear "legalistic" and have to watch their congregations dwindle—

—Or, on the other hand, did I cherish the truths of God's Word and purpose in my soul that I would walk in them regardless of the consequences?? I was reminded of the fact that "Abraham obeyed" when God called upon him to leave his family, who though they were saved, were compromising in idolatry; that "Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God...esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt;" of Daniel who "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies," and of numerous other saints of old who took their stand against what was highly popular in apostate religion.

#### *TAKING A STAND*

Burnell, I finally took a stand back in the mid 1950s partly as a result of your father's strong ministry to me. Furthermore, I know exactly what he taught and stood for in his vigorous support of the ministry of Maurice M. Johnson on all those issues. I challenged them on all that they taught and exemplified and found it was true to the Word

of God. One of the most beautiful messages I ever heard on the subject of the church of Jesus Christ was from your father. It was delivered at a camp up in the mountains above San Bernardino. It was both *positive* and *negative*. It laid out the beautiful truth of what Christ is building and BECAUSE THAT TRUTH WAS SO BEAUTIFUL he soberly reproved the compromising among religious Fundamentalism today. Therefore, I left my attachments to the highly popular Fundamentalists and associated with those who were walking “Outside the Camp.”

#### *THE DEFECTION IN THE 1980s*

When I saw in the mid 1980s many of our brethren going back into the fraternity *that I had come out of*, I, being in a leadership position at that time, drew a line, so to speak, and said “who is on the Lord’s side?” Sad to say, you refused to take that stand and “mark those who were causing division contrary to the Word of God.”

And now you advertised to us all the other night the many blessing you were having at your “Camp” and the many hundreds that were coming. And I asked if I could come to that camp and minister. You responded by asking, “What would you speak on?” And I said “on the church of Jesus Christ!” And you said, “NO!”

My son spoke up and said to me, “Why would you want to speak on that subject?” And I said, “*Because it is a very beautiful subject, and I would also want every one to **walk** in that truth!* Next to salvation it is the most important truth in the Bible.” Burnell, you added that you “**avoid controversial subjects.**”

Perhaps I should ask you now, “*Would you allow John the Baptist to speak?*”

Or, “*Would you allow the Lord Jesus Christ to speak?*”

Or, “*Would you allow the apostle Paul to speak?*”—

—(*Seeing none of these seemed to be able to avoid controversial subjects!*)

Or, “*Would you allow Maurice Johnson to speak??*”

Or, “*Would you allow the Wilbur Johnson that I knew to speak?*”

Burnell, you positively affirmed to us that you still believe what your father believed! And I am quite sure that in your mindset this is true—at least in externals.

However, the real question is, *are you willing to walk as your father walked?* You can believe like your father and yet walk in a compromising fraternity that doesn’t offend anyone! Is it possible you are making the very same mistake I had been making while I was in the Fundamentalists and arguing with your father? I was equating all the many apparent blessings taking place in the Fundamentalists (a lot of which was theatrical), and the vast numbers of people who were coming to that fellowship (which consisted of a confusing mixture of fellowships) with the actual and real blessings of God. No doubt, many Christians confuse the outward blessings of big crowds, the modern musical entertainment (and I understand you have some come and entertain at your camp who entertain in all the various denominations with their musical ability), and all the sweet testimony, with the real and actual spiritual blessing of God. As Maurice Johnson used to say there is an actual difference between God’s real spiritual blessings and “Satan’s bloat.” It is only to the degree we walk in the truth of God’s Word that there are genuine

spiritual blessings. And I am quite confident you have some of this. But it is also a reality that a great many of such blessings in the religious world today are nothing more than “Satan’s bloat.” Because the more you *compromise* the more people you will get, and the more people you get, the more you compromise. I say again, there is spiritual blessing to the degree we walk in the Light!

*My Calling is to “PREACH THE WORD”*

I reminded you that the early days of Christianity spelled “C-O-N-F-L-I-C-T.” And furthermore, Satan finally achieved the ability to neutralize Christianity by creating the artificial “Imperial (man-made) Church.” Satan realized the less C-O-N-F-L-I-C-T, the less real testimony. Consequently, compromising Christianity began to be the chief persecutor of the real Christians.

We are living at the close of this dispensation of time. The one thing that every Christian admits is that these are days of “apostasy.” Paul, the inspired apostle of Jesus Christ, charged the true ministers of Jesus Christ concerning their ministry in those days (II Tim. 4:1-5),

“I charge you therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ...

Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season,

REPROVE, REBUKE, EXHORT, with great patience and instruction,

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...*”

Just imagine, for the last days, we are charged to give TWO NEGATIVES with every positive. Maurice Johnson often publicly pointed our attention to this Scripture and indicated that the ministers of Christ in the last days will not be popular men “who avoid controversial subjects.” They will be men of God who are fearless, and have a single eye to the Head of the church Who said, “A servant is not greater than his Lord.”

And I can still hear your father, always near the front of the audience, say—  
“A-M-E-N!” and “Thank God!”

*THE “CHOOSING SPIRIT”*

Burnell, the real basis of sectarianism is the “choosing spirit.” That is what sectarianism means and is at its core. The Fundamentalists “choose” what they consider truths that we can “all agree upon” and those on which we can’t see alike “we don’t talk about”! The spirit of “toleration” and “appeasement” is what every “carnal” Christian wants to hear because then they can select what they will walk in and what they will not.

**Burnell, the difference between you and your father is that your father was instrumental in getting me out of the compromising, Interdenominational Fundamentalists, whereas you are so tolerant, you would leave me there, were I still in it!** If you believe what your father believed—you sure aren’t practicing it!

Yours in faithfulness, Jack Langford (“*I thought we had seen the last of him!*”—  
You reminded us your father once said this, in your hearing regarding me, when he was surprised to see me come back. I know your father was glad to see me back because in the days and years ahead he called on me many times to assisted him in his service to the saints. I would hope you would be pleased as well-- ?)

