

Is There a Baby in the Charismatic Bathwater?

1 Thessalonians 5:21

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All right, as you...as you might expect, when we announced that we were holding this conference to coincide with the release of a new book on the Charismatic Movement, most of the feedback that came from our Charismatic friends was sharply critical. Some of it was bitterly acrimonious and most of the criticisms, so far, have come in the form of blog posts and tweets and editorials in Charismatic magazines and other sort of public slap downs. The thing is you have to bear in mind, they've all come before anybody actually read the book. But I do want to say this, in fact, somebody just gave me a statistic that there are more people watching the Live Stream than there are here in person. (Applause) So to my Charismatic friends, I say, "Welcome to the discussion. And I am truly grateful for the feedback we've received and I look forward to the wave of responses that I know are yet to come.

One of the most widely read critiques of the "*Strange Fire*" conference came from Michael Brown. I know many of you have read that because probably more than two dozen people have asked me about it. He posted a series of articles with Charisma Magazine website. He was particularly distressed about John MacArthur's suggestion that some of the Charismatic hijinks are blasphemous. And John, of course, is responding to the common Charismatic complaint that any critique of Charismatic phenomena runs a serious risk of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. In fact, one of the main points John makes in the book, and you'll see this as you read it, is that to attribute the works of the flesh, or the works of the devil to the Holy Spirit actually denigrates the Holy Spirit rather than exalting Him. and that is obviously a kind of blasphemy. That's not the wrong word to apply to it.

Now Michael Brown thinks that assessment is too harsh because apparently in his view, in Michael Brown's view, any conceivable kind of blasphemy that involves the Holy Spirit is an unpardonable transgression because he equates that...here's what he says, this quote from his article, "If John MacArthur's charges are true," he says, "this means that many leaders in the Charismatic Movement have committed the unpardonable sin and are therefore hell bound," unquote.

Now that, of course, is not what John MacArthur says and that's not what we believe. **Matthew 12:31** says, "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven." Jesus uses a definite article there that is very significant. We don't believe that every careless or ignorant or accidental sin against the third member of the Trinity is automatically unforgivable. We don't believe that. Michael Brown may believe that. I don't believe that's what Scripture teaches.

Jesus, in that context, was responding to one specific kind of blasphemy that was so deliberate and so hard-hearted that no one would ever repent from it anyway. In fact, notice what Jesus actually says. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn to Matthew chapter 12, **Matthew 12:31**. He says this, "Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people," assuming, of course they repent. "Except," He says, "this one particular sin." It's one very specific sin. He prefaces that warning with a lavish promise of full pardon and cleansing to anyone and everyone who repents. He's making a point there about the vast extent of God's willingness to forgive. And He gives one singular exception and it's just one category of hard-hearted haters of Christ. And He was actually speaking about some Pharisees who were there present and who had just called Him satanic. They knew who He was. They were fully aware that He had met every claim He needed to prove He was the Messiah and yet they tried to turn people away from Him anyway. Which made their sin a deliberate, final, whole-hearted irreversible rejection of Christ and they sealed it with a blasphemy that was totally deliberate from willful hearts that had already seen and understood and known the truth about Christ and His glory, but they spurned Him anyway. That was the unpardonable sin.

Now I preached a three-part series on the unpardonable sin. You can download it for free if you want to. It's somewhere on the Internet, just Google the thing, Unpardonable sin with my name, and you might find some other thing about how I've committed unpardonable sins, but in the mix you'll probably find that...that series and feel free to download it and listen to it.

But the point here is that it is indeed sinful, it is blasphemous to invoke the Holy Spirit's name to justify any kind of foolish doctrines or fleshly behavior or false prophecy. And that ought to be evident. I mean, that is the definition of blasphemy. And, in fact, we are sounding this alarm about Charismatic chicanery, precisely in order to call our Charismatic friends to repent of what I think is the besetting sin of their Movement, namely the sin of attributing to the Holy Spirit words He has not spoken and things He has not done. That's a sin and it's a blasphemous sin.

Now it is obvious or it ought to be that the visible church today is overrun with people who are speaking messages in God's name that God has not authorized. They proclaim false prophecies. They claim divine authority for dreams and visions that God never gave. They bind burdens on people that God never intended and they teach strange precepts and doctrines that have no basis whatsoever in Scripture. That is a vast problem worldwide in the church. And the Charismatic Movement is a bottomless well of errors such as those. We would argue that the, in fact probably the primary conduit through which the vast majority of troublesome doctrines and practices are coming into the evangelical community today is the broad road of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement. And in my opinion, that is self-evident. If you doubt it, I invite you to try to offer statistical evidence to refute it.

But back to Michael Brown, like all honest Charismatics, he freely acknowledges that the Charismatic Movement has indeed spawned an overabundance of charlatans, and phonies, and heretics and crackpots. But he says this, quote: "I am far more concerned about denying the true fire than I am about putting out every aberrant Charismatic brushfire," unquote. He seems to think that

it's unreasonable for anyone to expect that he, a Charismatic, should speak out and condemn the aberrations in his own Movement. And so he asks, quote, "Why must Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors renounce extremes in their Movement, to somehow prove they're orthodox?" unquote.

Well I'm happy to answer that question. Why...why is it important for Charismatic pastors to renounce the extremes and the heresies in their own Movement. In the words of **Titus 1:9**, Paul says, "It is every pastor's duty to hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine but also rebuke those who contradict it." That's a duty of every pastor. Yet Michael Brown goes on to ask this, quote, "If a Charismatic pastor is shepherding his flock and feeding them God's Word and his people are not guilty of these abuses or watching these TV preachers, why is it his responsibility to address those errors," unquote. And that, I fear, is the attitude that is all too typical of Charismatics as a group, even the best of them. There is this smothering fear that any critical evaluation of their Movement risks blaspheming the Holy Spirit, even if it is a mild critique of the most outlandish Charismatic monkey business. If you don't give at least a tacit credence to the whimsical claims and outlandish behavior of whatever the latest Charismatic fad is, you will be branded as skeptic, you'll be called a rationalist, you'll be told that you are perilously close to committing the unpardonable sin.

Now think about this. If every hint of caution or discretion, every plea for discernment is seen as a close cousin of rank unbelief, if you were a Charismatic, you would probably figure it's better to let the claims that are being made by the extreme element in your Movement, just go unchallenged. And in practice, that is what is happening. So you have all kinds of carnal and mellow dramatic and aberrant behavior being attributed to the Holy Spirit and almost no one inside the Movement ever raises a peep of protest. And that, frankly, is a shameful affront to the name of Christ and to His reputation. And it's no exaggeration to call that blasphemy, it is a kind of blasphemy to let Christ's name be dishonored like that and to say nothing about it, to look the other way.

But, at the same time here is Michael Brown's chief criticism of John MacArthur. Quoting again, "MacArthur has made sweeping critical statements often throwing out the baby with the bathwater, not only rejecting the dangerous excesses and extremes in the Charismatic Movement but also labeling some genuine works of the Spirit as Charismatic Chaos," unquote. And I was interested about this so it's sort of following the online dialogue. In a subsequent article, Michael Brown got fairly specific about what it is that he considers genuine works of the Spirit. And frankly, it is profoundly troubling when you understand what even a thoughtful Charismatic like Michael Brown accepts as genuine because he defends several patently false prophets and prophetesses. He names, for example, Cindy Jacobs. Look her up on You Tube if you want to see something interesting. And Mike Bickle whom Michael Brown describes as godly. And if you don't know Mike Bickle, I'll introduce you to him before we're through here. But Michael Brown especially takes issue with John MacArthur's description of the famous Charismatic Revival in Brownsville, Florida in the 1990's. John MacArthur referred to it as, quote: "A mindless emotional orgy marked by irrational sensual and fleshly behavior," unquote.

Now the Brownsville Revival was a Charismatic mecca from about 1995 through 1999, /and Michael Brown himself was the leader of the Brownsville Revival School of Ministry for most of those years, until he was fired in 2000 as the Movement was dying. And when it was all over, the host church there in Brownsville was in debt to the tune of more than eleven million dollars. And at the time, Lee Jay Grady who is the editor of *Chrisma Magazine*, a Charismatic magazine, wrote about the demise of Brownsville. And Grady is, of course, himself a Charismatic, and to give him credit, he is one of the few Charismatics who is sometimes candid about how dysfunctional the Movement is. And he wrote an article titled "What Happened to Brownsville's Fire." Look that up on line and read it if you're interested. And you can decide for yourself whether John MacArthur's description of Brownsville is correct. But here's a line from Lee Grady's article, quote, "One night...he says...in the midst of all the pandemonium near the stage, I ran over to where Hill, the pastor, was praying, he grabbed my head and screamed, 'Fire, Fire! More, Lord.' Grady says, "I was one of the thousands who fell backwards on the floor," unquote.

And then near the end of the article as he's describing how all this sort of melted down, Grady says, quote, "For those in Pensacola who were swept up in the ecstasy of those early years and then endured splits, resignations, debts and disappointments, the word 'revival' now has a hollow ring to it," unquote. I don't know about you but that does not sound like the work of the Holy Spirit to me. And when you understand what Michael Brown himself classifies as evidence of the Holy Spirit's genuine work, it's frankly pretty hard to sympathize with the indignation he aims at critics of the Charismatic Movement. A man in his position ought to be one of the chief critics.

But since the baby in the bathwater cliché is not only from him but fairly universally one of the favorite and most common replies Charismatics give to their critics, I want to address that issue. Are we throwing the baby out with the bathwater? I did, by the way, a quick Google search and easily found literally hundreds of places where Charismatics respond to their critics by complaining that non-Charismatics who - who complain about Charismatic aberrations are just throwing the baby out with the bathwater. They love that cliché. And so, I thought let's, as Paul said earlier, put on our hip waders and probe around in the murky bathwater and see if we can find a baby anywhere in there. And my first question for Charismatics who truly care about the authority of Scripture, is this. If you bristle at every critique of your Movement, what is your proposal to keep from constantly accumulating filth in your bathtub? Because it is an incontrovertible fact that the Charismatic Movement is a breeding ground for charlatans and false prophets, and greed mongers, and heretics, and wolves in sheep's clothing. All you have to do is turn on your television to see abundant evidence of that.

Now it is true that wolves hide out in every congregation and every denomination in the visible church, and that includes even the best of churches. But the Charismatic Movement from its very inception has produced a relentless parade of scoundrels far exceeding anything you'd find in any non-Charismatic circles. For a Movement that claims they are the only ones who get what it truly means to be a Spirit-filled believer, Charismatics as a group suffer from a stunning and I would say pathological scarcity of the fruits of genuine sanctification. And a little more than a century, the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements have spun off so many bad doctrines and bizarre characters

that there's literally a thick dictionary that I keep in my office to help me keep track of all of them. Zondervan published this big dictionary of Charismatic Movements. And as you thumb through it, it is shocking how unvirtually every page there's some aberration or some heretic or some charlatan or some phony who has managed to work his way into leadership in that Movement. It's a pervasive problem. There are five or six religious television channels on my satellite TV service and all of them feature wall-to-wall frauds and phonies and faith healers and money-grubbing religious quacks. All of the religious rogues on TV are Charismatics. When I wrote that line, I thought...is that really true? And I couldn't think of a single exception. Every one of the fifteen best known Charismatic televangelists either preach as a false gospel, or prophesy falsely, or promotes heresy, or lives lavishly with funds that they have bilked from poor people. It's a scandal and it ought to be. Virtually all of them, all of the best known Charismatic televangelists have either failed morally or otherwise bought...brought some kind of significant public dishonor on the name of Christ. All of them are disqualified from ministry on biblical grounds. But they are the most visible face of American Christianity worldwide.

I was ashamed years ago when I visited Ukraine with John MacArthur. Less than three months after the fall and dissolution of the Soviet Union, and we stayed in a hotel in Kiev and as we went to breakfast, there was a television set on in the corner of the little restaurant in that hotel and I looked up and there was Jan Crouch. They were broadcasting TBN. It's shameful. And let's be clear, the vast majority of the millions of Charismatics worldwide are following the televangelists. Charismatics as a group are not taking their cues from the handful of reformed Charismatics who actually do preach the gospel. The Reformed Charismatics are actually just a small fringe at the outer edge of the larger Movement. And in fact they are a negligible minority in terms of both numbers and influence. And the guys you see on TV with the poufy hairdos and shiny suits are the true Charismatic mainstream.

Now on what basis do I say that because I know that claim is always challenged. Any statistic you can name would prove that. Charismatic television is a multi-billion dollar business. No one knows the exact figures because most of the large Charismatic ministries assiduously avoid any kind of accountability. But their reach is long and their combined viewership dwarfs even the most generous estimates of Reformed Charismatics. The Trinity Broadcasting Network alone draws some one hundred million viewers worldwide. They have more than eighteen thousand affiliates and they are on in more than one hundred countries. That is a massive vat of seriously contaminated bathwater. Which brings me to my second question, and this is the main question I'm interested in exploring, is there indeed a live baby in that toxic quagmire? Did the baby drown in that murky mess? Was there really a baby in there in the first place? And what is it that we are trying so hard to preserve? Precisely what is it? How many false teachers and evil doctrines does a Movement have to spawn before men and women who claim to love the Word of God will write it off?

Remember Todd Bentley? He suddenly rose to fame in April of 2008 when he was invited to speak at a church in Lakeland, Florida and supposedly a revival broke out. And for six months or so, Todd Bentley was THE most famous and most influential Charismatic leader in America. He was a Canadian born, tough guy want-to-be with hobnail biker boots and neck tattoos. And he had a

criminal past. At age 15 he had sexually assaulted a young boy and Bentley himself admits that he had committed other sexual crimes for which he was never charged. He told a reporter that he had been involved in a sexual assault ring and he was a drug addict by age 17. And at age 18, he professed conversion to Christ. He began attending a Charismatic small group fellowship in an organization known as Fresh Fire Ministries. Bentley is, if you've ever seen him, he's a glib talker and when they asked him to give his testimony, he wowed the group with stories about his sorted past. And before long, he took over leadership of that group and he was soon getting speaking gigs in Charismatic churches worldwide. And in 2008 he came to Lakeland, Florida to lead what was originally conceived as a week-long series of meetings. And it turned into a prolonged event, lasting almost seven months through October of 2008. And that summer, all that summer Bentley was the talk of the whole Charismatic world. It was Live Stream. His meetings were Live Streamed on the Worldwide Web so you could watch from anywhere and millions did and were swept up in the delirium. One of the major Charismatic television networks, God TV preempted their normal programming so that they could broadcast Live From Lakeland every night. And it was utterly and completely grotesque from the beginning. Bentley loved violence. He frequently boasted about his unorthodox healing methods which usually involved a punch to the stomach or a boot to the head. One man got a tooth knocked out on live television. In fact there's a You Tube video that shows Bentley kicking a man in the stomach hard enough to cause internal injuries. And it turns out the man had Stage Four colon cancer and Bentley said that's how the Holy Spirit told him to drive the demon of cancer out. That's just one example of things that happened many, many times.

He boasted about kicking an elderly woman in the face. And he claimed the Holy Spirit told him to do that too. He would frequently drive his knee into the midsection of people who came forward for healing, or for some kind of spiritual anointing. And in Norway he created a scandal by repeatedly slapping a young girl in the face. He also boasted, by the way, that he had raised more than a dozen people from the dead.

This guy was over-the-top narcissistic. He was a braggart. He was bombastic. He was often angry, profane and deliberately uncouth. I don't think it's unfair to say that his stage persona was utterly devoid of any hint of grace. And, in fact, the personality that he deliberately projected was exactly antithetical to the true fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, all of those things. None of them were evident in his public behavior. And Bentley's teaching was also devoid of any sound biblical or doctrinal content. Never has the Charismatic Movement produced a more blatant or more carnal fraud, at least I can't think of one. I suppose they have. But he was the most famous, at least for a time.

And a number of non-Charismatic onlookers pointed out all of those things very early and warned people not to follow this man. Todd Friel, for example, used to repeatedly play sound and video clips straight from the Lakeland meetings and he would warn his listeners that Bentley is sinister and almost any random clip of Bentley was...if you just listened to him talking...it should have been enough to prove that his teaching and his methods were all together unbiblical. His bluster and his bravado, I found them nauseating. But most Charismatics actually scolded Todd Friel rather than Todd Bentley. A flash mob of angry Charismatics called in to Friel's radio program to accuse him of

making hasty judgments. You know, they'd say things like, "Well this could legitimately be a new move of the Spirit, it's dangerous to speak against it. And I distinctly remember that some of his callers, Todd has this thing called Beep Talk, you call in and leave a voice mail, and you know, he'll play it, even if you're angry at him. So keep that in mind if you want to get angry at Todd and call his voice mail, you might get on the radio doing that.

But what I remember is that several of them quoted from **Acts 5:38**, Gamaliel who said, "Remember I tell you, 'Keep away from these men and let them alone for if this plan or this understanding is of man, it will fail. But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found to be opposing God.'" That was Gamaliel's advice. That's a common Charismatic answer to critics.

And in those days I was writing for the Pyromaniac's blog. Pyromaniacs often pointed out the dangers of various kinds of aberrant doctrines and unorthodox movements, not just...we didn't pick on the Charismatics per se, we would include them sometimes. But mostly emergent and post-modernists and pretty much anyone who didn't have a high view of Scripture would be a target for our critiques. And my blog partner, Dan Philips, who is here this week, wrote a couple of posts about the Lakeland Revival in which he simply pleaded for readers to use an uncomplicated biblical standard to evaluate every popular movement and every person who claims to be Spirit-led in an uncharacteristic way. Dan wrote this article without actually making any overt criticism of Todd Bentley.

Here's some of the things he said, quote: "If it doesn't center on and exalt the person and the work of Christ, it's not a true work of the Holy Spirit. (Still quoting) If it wasn't produced by the preaching of the Word of God, it's not a work of the Holy Spirit. If it doesn't produce holy living which includes godly behavior and specifically self-control, it isn't authentic revival. If the leaders aren't men well-known for the qualities listed in **1 Timothy 3:1** through 7, and Titus chapter 1 verses 6 through 9, and specifically known for being in subjection to the Word of God and for soundly teaching the whole counsel of God, then it's not a Movement you should follow," unquote.

Now those seem to me like fairly sensible, obvious, biblical guidelines, right? Those principles are sound and sane and scriptural and equally applicable to Charismatics and non-Charismatics alike. But we immediately had a stampede of people commenting on our blog and warning us to be careful lest we be found fighting against God, or blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Leave it alone, they said. If it's not of God, it will come to nothing. That seems to be the national anthem of open but cautious evangelicals. It belongs, I think, to the same species of argument as the baby in the bathwater cliché. It's based on an unbiblical idea that the Spirit of God usually manifests Himself in ways that are strange and irrational. That's his normal way of manifesting Himself. And so ultimately if we go by that way of thinking, we would have no fool-proof sensible or biblical measure by which to discern what is true and what is false because no wild crook claim, no preposterous behavior no matter how strange, none of it could ever be totally written off just because it is categorically silly or contrary to the basic qualities of grace and self-control, or if it seems more like dementia than authentic spiritual fruit. Those would be no reasons to write it off.

And in fact, in recent years Charismatics have seemed enthralled with precisely those kinds of phenomena...silly, drunken, flamboyant behavior, barking noises, people falling into trance-like narcosis, you know, being slain in the Spirit has been a Charismatic staple now for at least twenty years, even though it has absolutely no biblical warrant. And now there's a group led by a man named John Crowder(?) who pretends the Holy Spirit is a supernatural narcotic that will put you into this sort of thick inebriated stupor. Look him up, John Crowder. Some of his stuff is the rankest blasphemy. He claims he is token the ghost, or smoking Jehovawana(?). And sometimes, I'll warn you, he gets downright obscene and if you've never seen him before, you'll be tempted to think that this is an unbeliever doing a bad parody. He claims the Holy Spirit makes him behave that way.

And over at Rick Joyner's Morning Star Ministries, they do the Holy Ghost Hokey Pokey. And if you haven't seen that one, look up the You Tube video. At Bethel Church up in Redding, California they feature the fire tunnel which is a kind of gauntlet for the laying on of hands. You line people up and run a girl through it and they're touching these coeds while the girls experience uncontrollable spasms and giggling.

Are you familiar with Bethel Church in Redding, California? Bill Johnson is the pastor there. Get that right. That's BILL Johnson. (Laughter) His church is the home of the mega-popular worship band known as Jesus Culture. And Bill Johnson's wife, Benny, talks about how she drives around the southwest United States and she'll stop periodically to get out of her car and blow a shofar and then yell, "Wakey, Wakey." And she says she's waking up angels in preparation for a great revival. She's serious about it, if you can be serious about such a thing.

There is so much nonsense coming out of Redding alone that I frankly don't have time to catalog it all for you, but the growing popularity of Jesus Culture among mainstream evangelical young people is actually opening the door for all kinds of this nonsense to infiltrate your churches, because many younger evangelicals in the generation are now coming to adulthood absolutely love Jesus Culture and since very few voices are critiquing this stuff, they have no defense against it. And, of course, Todd Bentley managed to baptize crass violence as a kind of spiritual anointing. Supporters of that approach actually sometimes defend him by pointing out, "Well that's what Smith Wigglesworth did." Smith Wigglesworth was an early twentieth century Pentecostal hero from England who liked to call himself the Apostle of faith. And he likewise tried to heal people by punching them out.

And by the way, World Magazine reported that several people whom Todd Bentley claimed he had healed from fatal diseases died within a very short time. They did a survey to find out what happened to these people. One guy died within a week of being punched by Bentley. A non-Christian blogger wrote this about him, quote: "Todd Bentley is in a league of his own. I'm convinced that fringe lunatics are embarrassed by Todd Bentley. Somewhere...somewhere in the shriveled lump that is his heart, even Fred Phelps is ashamed to be part of the same religion as Todd Bentley. Fred Phelps, of course, is the guy that pickets funerals with "God hates fags" signs. He's also shameful. But this guy is trying to make the point that Bentley's even stranger than that. More of an abomination than that.

Now you might think that the relatively sane and sober Charismatics, the guys with some biblical scruples, the people who wish to preserve the baby while throwing out the dirty bathwater, you might think that they would be the first and loudest voices to condemn these foolish blasphemous practices in their own Movement, because I can guarantee you, I haven't watched the obviously the twitter feed from people responding to what I'm actually saying right now, but I guarantee you, it's filled with notes from people who are trying to point out that what he's talking about are extremes, this is not true of the mainstream.

Okay, let's even accept that what I think is a twisted reversal of what's really extreme and what's really mainstream, accepting that, why isn't it? Why is it that these guys with the biblical scruples who claim to be reformed and sound and solid, why are they not the loudest voices to condemn all of this stuff? If you think that's what's happening, you would be wrong. We almost never hear the most respected Reformed Charismatic voices speaking out against the abuses in the Charismatic Movement. They do occasionally. I know you can point out links where they have. There's not really a theme in their teaching. And especially while some of the weirdness is at the peak of its popularity and influence. That is when careful discernment would be the most helpful but that is generally when all you hear from the Movement are crickets. Sometimes the people you hope would be a voice of sanity actually join the aberrant movements and become part of them. Sam Storms lent his conservable credibility to the Kansas City Prophets for several years, even after it was perfectly clear that these guys were false prophets. Wayne Grudem, likewise showed an undue tolerance of prophetic abuses as a member of the Vineyard Movement through most of the 1990-s while the Vineyard was spinning out aberrations like Kansas City Prophets and the Toronto Blessing, and Dr. Grudem is still stoking the fires of prophetic abuse today by saying these false prophecies are okay, they're acceptable, it's what you should expect. And without the weight of Wayne Grudem's scholarly credentials, the proliferation of places like the School of Supernatural Ministry in Northern California and dozens of other training centers that are pumping out false prophets today, those kinds of things never would have gotten any traction without Grudem's scholarly influence.

Then there's Jack Deere who is a former professor at Dallas Seminary who renounced cessationism and within a few short years, he virtually engineered the spiritual train wreck that culminated in the public disqualification of a prophet known as Paul Cain. Paul Cain was the principle prophet of the 1990's and he turned out to be a secret drunkard and sodomite. And I think it's fair to point out that the track record on these issues ought to be an embarrassment to my Reformed Charismatic brothers. And that's true even if we limit the discussion to the fruit of their most respected leaders. These were the men who claimed the gift of prophecy is still operative today. And some, if not all of them, have claimed at one time or another that they possess prophetic abilities. Many of them believed that there are authentic apostles in their midst. But they have repeatedly demonstrated an utter inability to identify the phonies in the Charismatic Movement. They don't seem to recognize some of these problems until some nuclear level scandal breaks out. Worse, they and their followers often scold or shout down non-Charismatics who try to warn the flock early. That's what was happening when Todd Bentley's popularity was at its peak.

Now I don't have the gift of prophecy. And, frankly, my football predictions have been wrong every week for the past ten football seasons. But from day one, I tried to warn people who...anyone who brought the subject up...that Todd Bentley was headed for infamy and disgrace. I could see it. And the first time I ever met Paul Cain, I knew he was a phony. The first time I listened to a tape of the Kansas City Prophet Bob Jones, I told the person who gave me the tape that this man was a false prophet.

How did I know? It's simple, really. Because the words and the actions of these men were extra biblical and yet they claimed that what they were saying was direct revelation from God. Isaiah 8 verse 20, To the Law and to the Testimony, if they do not speak according to this Word, it's because there's no light in them. You don't need any clairvoyance to make the right judgment if you simply follow the Word of God.

Now, if someone like me who lacks any sixth sense or psychic powers, can see impending spiritual disaster, why can't the self-styled prophets and dreamer of dreams see it? Now I should acknowledge that John Piper did finally warn us to be on guard against Todd Bentley. But Piper didn't make that statement until after it became known that Bentley was having an extra-marital affair. What Dr. Piper originally wrote in response to Bentley's affair was perfectly sound advice, he said this, quote: "Our test for every movement like this that comes along should first be doctrinal and expositional. Is this awakening carried along by a love for the truth and a passion to hear the whole counsel of God proclaimed," unquote.

That is absolutely true and it's great advice, but it would have been helpful to hear that from someone of John Piper's stature when Todd Bentley's influence was on the rise, when lots of young men who were looking to Piper for guidance were confused by Todd Bentley.

Dr. Piper has shown a pattern of hesitation and uncertainty on issues like this for decades. In 1990 he preached a message titled, "Are signs and wonders for today?" At the time, the Charismatic Movement was obsessed with the so-called third wave of Charismatic phenomena. The gift of tongues was really just beginning to be eclipsed by talk about other signs and wonders and specifically the gift of prophecy. Wayne Grudem's book on the gift of prophecy was...was clearly, it had been a powerful influence on John Piper's thinking and Dr. Piper considered the latest trends in the Charismatic Movement and said he was gripped by...these are his exact words...a heart-wrenching uncertainty." Those are his exact words...a heart-wrenching uncertainty. He said this, quote: "I sit at my desk with my head in my hands and I plead with the Lord. Here are two stacks of books by evangelical pastors and teachers. One stack argues that signs and wonders and healings were designed by God to help people recognize and believe in the Son of God and then to vindicate the authority of His apostles. After the apostles died, and their writings were gathered up in the New Testament, the place of signs and wonders was passed and we should not seek them today. The other stack of books argues that signs and wonders should be sought and performed today in Jesus' name. The reason we don't see many is because of how little expectancy there is in the church." Piper says, "As I read these two stacks of books, I comb the scriptures, I pray and I wind up again and again somewhere in the middle with a lot of uncertainty.

Twenty-one years after he wrote that, after he said that, in an interview with an Australian journal, John Piper said he remembered that sermon and he told the interviewer how he had sent a busload of 50 people out to a Vineyard conference to listen and John Piper himself went to hear John Wimber. And in the end he said he wasn't...he wasn't persuaded by either the cessationist argument and yet he wasn't convinced that today's Charismatic phenomena are the same thing that we see in the apostolic era. He couldn't be a cessationist but he couldn't be a full-fledge Pentecostal either. He says he was most comfortable in that sort of agnostic middle ground and that's where he remains today, not really affirming and not really actually sounding any clear alarm against whatever Charismatic fad happens to be the most popular at the moment.

Now when Todd Bentley first came on the scene, I thought Bentley was such an outrageous bad example that no one would ever take him seriously. I thought he was self-refuting. But virtually every public forum where evangelicals gather to talk, people were wondering, "Could this be a true anointing of the Holy Spirit, or not?" And it frankly was not particularly helpful for someone of John Piper's stature to hold off criticism until after Todd Bentley had already morally discredited himself. And I don't mean to single out John Piper as if he were the only one with this tendency. I've often thought that most of those who describe themselves as open but cautious are cautious in exactly the wrong direction. A person whose exercising genuine biblical caution should have had no hesitation about saying Todd Bentley and his tactics and his teaching are unbiblical and dangerous. Certainly if the gift of prophecy were truly operating among Reformed Charismatics today, someone, somewhere with an influential voice ought to have warned the rest of the Movement that this guy was bad news long before he utterly made shipwreck of the faith.

But there's this sort of carefully cultivated non-committal spirit of indecision that permeates most of the Reformed Charismatic in open but cautious segments of the evangelical community. It's a kind of deliberate agnosticism with regard to discerning spirits. And so the extremists and the charlatans can make any claim or pull any stunt they like with almost total impunity. The handful of Charismatics who have the most influence in conservative evangelical circles have basically settled themselves into a kind of comfortable indifference. You remember the line I quoted from Michael Brown earlier? He asks, "Why should Pentecostals and Charismatic pastors renounce the extremes in their movement?" Really? Supposedly cautious continuationists watch this procession of Charismatic horse play and they are curious, they are intrigued, they are generally non-plus, but they refuse to make any judgment until after the wheels come totally off whatever the latest bandwagon is. If someone looks into the turbid swamp of Charismatic sludge, and thinks that attitude of non-judgmental passivity is the baby, forget it...forget it. That kind of smug, deliberate indecision has more in common with double-mindedness than with faith.

There are times when staking out a middle position is simply the wrong thing to do. And it's never more wrong than when thousands of people are going around claiming to speak for God but they're prophesying falsely. Doesn't that seem like common sense? And, in fact, let's talk about the Charismatic infatuation with so-called fresh words of prophecy. I'll have more to say about this tomorrow in my breakout session, but this is probably the singular issue Reformed Charismatics are most obsessed with. And let me say something with emphasis, before we go any further.

I do have friends, I have good friends, long-time friends who are Charismatics, relatives and neighbors and acquaintances, people whom I dearly love who are part of the Charismatic Movement . And furthermore, despite my criticisms and my frustration with their passivity, I do have warm affection and heart-felt respect for these men like John Piper, and Wayne Grudem and Sam Storms. I have greatly benefited from their ministries, especially what they've published and preached from God's Word. And I regularly recommend resources from all of them that I have found helpful. Obviously I disagree with them, I strongly disagree with them about what to do with the rank heresies that arise so frequently in the Charismatic community. But that doesn't diminish my respect and my gratitude for the many ways these men have ministered to me with regard to other issues.

But I think if we polled Charismatics, especially the ones I most closely related to, my Charismatic friends, if we polled them, we'd discover that the gift of prophecy is probably what most of them would say, that's the precious baby in the Charismatic bathwater. But modern prophecy happens to be the singular issue that most arouses my deepest concerns. That's because the most serious of all the Charismatic abuses are all rooted in this notion that God is regularly speaking into the minds of each believer, that there's some revealed truth that is available to us that supplements whatever God has given us in Scripture and that this newer revelation, this personal private revelation naturally supersedes Scripture in relevance and timeliness if not in importance...in practice, I say, not necessarily that that's their theology but that is their practice.

I mentioned that prophecy seems to have eclipsed tongues as the principle gift in the contemporary Charismatic Movement. That is certainly true among Reformed Charismatics. Many do still speak in tongues, but they do it mostly in private and not all Reformed Charismatics even claim the gift of tongues. John Piper, for example, says he has sought but he's never received the gift of tongues. In fact, there's a video he posted on line where he talks about this and he said this, quote: "I don't buy the Pentecostal historical teaching that you must speak in tongues in order to signify that you are filled with the Spirit. I don't believe I've ever authentically spoken in tongues. I think it's interesting that he added the word "authentically," and he does in that same context talk about how he used to repeat syllables to try to, you know, prime the pump and get the gift going.

He goes on to say that he still prays for tongues from time to time. And in fact, the exact words with which he describes how he prays, listen, quote: "Lord, a lot of my brothers and sisters have this toy, this gift, can I have it too?" But the point Dr. Piper is making is that, and it's a true point, that even in Scripture the gift of tongues is not the best or the most prominent of the New Testament miraculous gifts. That's actually what the Apostle Paul is saying. One of his main points in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, this gift of tongues is not and was never intended to be the predominant gift.

And I think that is a more or less typical viewpoint among Reformed Charismatics nowadays. The gift of prophecy has moved in to first position and tongues have taken a back seat. And as I said, I'm concerned about that because at the same time, the definition of prophecy has been downgraded and dumbed down from the biblical definition. Reformed Charismatics don't see false prophecy as a

significant problem. You know, a word of knowledge, or a prophetic pronouncement that turns out to be patently false? No big deal. In fact, they will admit, that's what happens most of the time. And as a result, you've got a serious epidemic of false prophecies that is being thrust upon the church today. And Reformed Charismatics continue to defend the practice.

I don't want to cover too much of what Tom Pennington already covered, he did a brilliant job this morning talking about this. But I want to reemphasize some of the things he said. Biblically, a prophet is someone who speaks the Word of God. I should say, he's someone who speaks the words of God. **Deuteronomy 18:18** is one of the principle Old Testament texts about the coming Messiah, that's where Messiah is revealed as the chief prophet of all prophets. And here's how God describes the prophetic task, **Deuteronomy 18:18**, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you among...from among their brothers and I will put My words in his mouth and he shall speak them to all that I command him." And remember, Tom read to us this morning about how when God called Moses, this was the role given to Aaron. He was Moses' prophet. Just like Jesus is God's prophet. And, in fact, I wouldn't use this language as Scripture doesn't but in **Exodus 7:1** God tells Moses, "I've made you to be a god to Pharaoh and your brother, Aaron, is your prophet." So here's Moses as far as...as far as Pharaoh is concerned, he's God and Aaron is his prophet.

So what was Aaron's duty? Exodus 4 verses 15 and 16, "You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. He shall speak for you to the people and he shall be your mouth and you shall be as God to him." So Scripture says repeatedly that prophecy is speaking words that God has put into your mouth. And Moses is like God in terms of his spiritual authority over Pharaoh. And Aaron is his prophet, speaking words put into his mouth by Moses. And that is precisely how prophecy, true prophecy works. The very words are put by God into the prophet's mouth and when the prophet prophesies, he's speaking for God if he's a true prophet. He's God's mouthpiece. He delivers an authoritative and infallible message that he has received from God. And nowhere between the Old and New Testaments is the definition of prophecy ever changed. A prophet is not someone who reports a hunch or announces whatever spontaneously comes to mind. A genuine prophet does not speak half-truths, blended with errors and ambiguities, nor is he someone who simply delivers an opinion that he feels strongly about. That's not prophecy.

A true prophet speaks a word from the Lord. And an authentic prophecy has, by definition, inherent authority. It's not a what if. If it's a real prophecy, and it contains a command, that command is binding. If it contains a rebuke, it's serious. And if it contains a warning, you better heed it. And the only way Scripture gives us to test whether someone is a true prophet or not is to check whether his prophecy is accurate or not.

And here's the problem with the modern prophets. This is the obvious give-away that ought to signal anyone with common sense that Charismatic prophets are not to be trusted. They have no track record of accuracy. All of them admit that their prophecies often turn out to be wrong. They have to admit that because it's patently obvious all of them prophesies falsely.

Back in 1989, the senior member of the Kansas City Prophets was Bob Jones. He said that fewer than two thirds of his prophecies were true. And then within two years of that, he was utterly discredited because he sexually abused women who came to him seeking prophetic counseling. Twenty years after that, in 2011, Mike Bickle, the pastor who originally shepherded the Kansas City Prophets admitted that in the forty years he has been personally been involved in the Charismatic Movement, he thinks, now this is a guy who is a Charismatic speaking in defense of the Charismatic Movement, he says in his opinion at least eighty percent of the miracles and prophecies and other phenomena he has witnessed in forty years' time, at least eighty percent of them have been false. He makes that statement with a smile. No shame, no apology, he thinks Charismatics should not be troubled by the mass of false claims in their midst. But if he's right, that means four out of five prophecies are false from the start.

And then he goes on to say that even the true prophecies, that twenty percent that he counts as true, are often turned out to be wrong because they're misinterpreted and then they lead people astray. Frankly I think he's grossly underestimating the problem. But even if we gave Mike Bickle the benefit of the doubt, here is one of the leading advocates and self-styled experts in the world of Charismatic prophecies, and he shamelessly admits that at least four out of five of their prophetic utterances are false. That is not a fact that can be overlooked or brushed aside. And it makes the whole point of view dangerous in the extreme. And it goes against everything Scripture teaches about true revelation from God. It perverts the truth and it misleads people about the proper way to discern God's will. Most of all, it seriously undermines the supremacy and the significance of the sure word of prophecy God has given us in His Word.

This is a critical issue. And reams of material have been published and written and disseminated by Reformed Charismatics to argue that it's okay for prophets to speak falsely, most of the time. That shouldn't be refuted at all because it comes with impressive academic credentials and the weight of Wayne Grudem's doctoral thesis behind it, it has created a massive problem in the districts of evangelicalism most of us inhabit.

Here's some thoughts about prophecy to take with you. In fact if you get nothing else from this session, please listen to this. First, there is a monstrous potential for evil in blithely assuming that all your private imaginations are some kind of supernatural promptings that the Holy Spirit gives you as some kind of divine revelation. People who order their lives by whims and feelings because they think their own intuition is some kind of revelatory authority, or some kind of prophetic gift, they're foolish to do that. **Proverbs 28:26**, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool." It's willfully gullible and it's sinfully superstitious to think that way. It's hostile to the whole biblical concept of discernment.

And second, to claim that God told you something when in fact He didn't, that is a profoundly wicked presumption and the fruits of it are always evil. It was a capital crime to make a claim like that under Moses' Law. And in my assessment, the very worst of all the sinister tendencies of the Charismatic Movement stems from this dangerous habit of claiming God has said something He never said.

I mentioned Paul Cain earlier. I said it in the early nineties, he was being touted as the greatest of all Charismatic prophets. He was supposedly able to do cold readings with supreme skill. Which means he could meet you for the first time and tell you uncanny details about your life and your background. Now there are entertainers and phony clairvoyance who do that as a parlor trick. It's not really all that unusual. But Paul Cain parlayed it into a meal ticket with John Wimber and then he latched on to John Deere, and finally he wormed his way into Westminster Chapel in London which is the church, of course, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once pastored, Westminster Chapel became Charismatic after the Lloyd-Jones era and they had at the time an American pastor, Dr. R.T. Kendle(?) who hired Paul Cain for a time as their resident prophet. I met Paul Cain once. John MacArthur I think referred to it a couple of days ago. But Jack Deere brought him here to a meeting with John MacArthur up in John's office in 1992, Lance Quinn and I sat in on that and it was instantly obvious to us that Paul Cain was not what he claimed. He appeared to be drunk. He was blurry-eyed and nearly incoherent. And he pretended to speak a short prophecy about John MacArthur. But he was wrong in every detail. And when he realized he was getting it wrong, he stopped trying to prophesy and just lapsed into a kind of sullen silence and didn't really say much for the rest of the meeting.

And Jack Deere later told me and Lance that Cain's behavior was because he was under such a heavy anointing. That's how he is under the anointing. I think he may have been under an anointing.

But at the time, it astonished me, seriously astonished me that so many intelligent people seem to give Paul Cain any credence whatsoever, but many, many did, including most of the leading Reformed Charismatics of that time. He was openly endorsed for years by Wayne Grudem and Sam Storms and John Piper, all of them.

Now understand, Paul Cain was never someone who should have been trusted. His only claim to credibility was this uncanny ability to do cold readings. He had hung around with some old style Pentecostal evangelists, faith healers, years before and fallen into sort of obsolescence for a while and revived his whole career on the back of John Wimber and Jack Deere. His theological pedigree was tainted long before he found acceptance among these Reformed Charismatics, but he remained in positions of prominence until 2005 after almost fifteen years of affiliation with the Reformed Charismatics and then it came to light that Cain had been living a double life all those years. He was a sodomite and a drunkard.

Now here was a man surrounded by people who claimed to have prophetic gifts and they saw this guy as a kind of mentor. We knew when we first met him, there's something terribly wrong with him. Why couldn't the Charismatic prophets detect that for fifteen-plus years?

I'll tell you why. Because they don't have a gift of prophecy. They don't have the gift of discerning spirits. And, in fact, they're trying to discern spirits the wrong way by the wrong means. It doesn't happen by intuition. It happens through the Word of God. But you know what? To this day Cain's Reformed enablers have not fully renounced his prophecies? I wrote to Wayne Grudem maybe six months ago because I noticed his endorsement was still on the latest edition of Jack Deere's book

which still touts Paul Cain as a great prophet. And I asked him if he was okay with that, did he still endorse that book? Did he still...did he still have this high esteem for what it taught including Paul Cain, especially in light of Paul Cain's moral failure? He wrote me back to say yes, I stand by my endorsement. And in that same interview that I quoted a while ago that John Piper gave to an Australian journal, he said this, quote, "Paul Cain was a charlatan, I think, but he really prophesied," unquote.

Now that's not a legitimate baby in the Charismatic bathwater. And, in fact, I think it summarizes pretty well why I think the whole mess needs to be thrown out all together because here are the very best theologians in the Charismatic Movement and after all the spiritual disaster that has stemmed from this teaching, they continue to justify the practice of encouraging people to proclaim prophecies that are unverified and unverifiable and which frequently prove to be dead wrong. That is a sinful gullibility and it fosters more sinful gullibility and therefore it undermines true faith. And confusion about whether God is really spoken or not, is the most dangerous threat to faith I can imagine.

I do love my Charismatic Reformed brethren. But when I look at the spiritual fruit they have born, and the truly edifying things I have learned from them, I have to say that none of the good,, valid, healthy fruit I see is rooted in any of their Charismatic distinctives. The true edifying fruit that is produced in their ministries stems from their devotion to Christ, their love of the gospel, their commitment to the authority and inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture and their Charismatic beliefs actually undermine and often conflict with what they say they believe about the sufficiency of Scripture. And that in my view is to the detriment of their ministries. And I think it would be unloving of me not to say so. And I have said so (applause) I have said so in every venue I can and I intend to continue saying so because the fruit of Charismatic teaching, even from the best of these teachers, is confusion and chaos or worse.

Hard as I look, and no matter how long I sift, I don't believe there's a baby in the bathwater. I don't think a baby could survive in a mess like that.

Listen, it's not just some kind of fantastic cosmic coincidence that has loaded the Charismatic Movement with an unusually high number of charlatans and heretics. This problem is in the Movement's DNA. When you trace the Charismatic Movement back to its roots, historically and theologically, it stems from a bramble bush, not a fruit tree. And you'll be able to read all about that in *Strange Fire*. The major reason the Charismatic Movement has produced so much bad teaching and aberrant behavior is because the distinctive doctrines of Charismatic belief foster gullibility while they continually seed the Movement with all kinds of whimsy. This notion that it's normative for Spirit-filled Christians to receive extra-biblical revelation from God through various mystical means has opened the door for all kinds of mischief.

A couple of years ago, Mark Driscoll posted a video, remember, claiming that the Spirit of God had given him a gift of discernment that allowed him to actually watch the sexual escapades of fornicators in his flock. It wasn't the fact that he would make such a claim that distressed and disappointed me, that seemed fairly typical for him, frankly. What troubled me was the large number

of young restless Reformed Charismatics who to this day stand by the view that pornographic clairvoyance might actually be a valid spiritual gift. And what disturbs me as much as all of that is the near total silence from older men, respectable men who have the stature and the influence to teach some of the younger men who might be tempted to experiment with that type of twisted soothsaying and they've been silent. The issue of false prophecies should not be blithely swept aside. This is not a small issue. It's not some kind of tertiary issue that really doesn't...we shouldn't argue over because we might divide the body. This is an important issue. And those who are pointing out the problem should not be dismissed as cranks and naysayers. The rank superstition and the counterfeit miracles that are being spawned out of Charismatic circles are as great a blithe on the church and as great a danger to the well-being of believers as the mysticism and the false doctrine that existed in the medieval church prior to the Protestant Reformation. This...I'm saying...is a serious enough problem that it really cries for a new Reformation. It's a serious threat to the cause of truth and the advance of the gospel as the...it's as serious as the Gnosticism and the home-brew heresies of the second and third centuries.

One of my favorite works on church history is a nineteenth century work from Scotland, William Cunningham's *Historical Theology* and as Cunningham surveyed the false doctrines that proliferated in the first hundred years of Christianity, he wrote this, quote: "Many of the heresies of the first and second centuries are very like the ravings of madmen who followed no definite standard whether natural or supernatural, whether reason or Scripture, but who gave full scope to their imaginations in the formation of their systems. That could be a description of the contemporary Charismatic Movement. People dreaming up doctrines out of their own hearts and their own imaginations and claiming God told them that. That is precisely what's happening today in the Charismatic Movement and as it seeps further and further into the theological circles we inhabit, we need to be more bold, to speak up and call a halt to it.

Go ahead and throw out the bathwater that's a century's worth of sludge in the bottom, it's not a baby, it's time to clean the sink.