

A Great Big Blind Spot

On Oct. 24, I began to write a new book entitled *Authentic Fire: A Response to John MacArthur's Strange Fire*. By God's grace, three weeks (and more than 400 pages) later, with contributions from Craig Keener and Sam Storms and others, the book was completed and is now available as an e-book.

In the next few articles, I'll share some of the key contents of the book with the hope that this will help deepen our hunger for God's truth and God's Spirit. Here, I'll focus on Chapter 3 of *Authentic Fire*, entitled "A Great Big Blind Spot," where I examine Pastor MacArthur's claims that:

1. "The **charismatic movement** as such has made no contribution to biblical clarity, no contribution to interpretation, no contribution to sound doctrine."
2. "People who have any connection to Judaism and Christianity have a connection to philanthropy. It is a striking anomaly, however, that there is essentially zero social benefit to the world from the Charismatic Movement. Where's the charismatic hospital? Social services? Poverty relief? This is a scam."
3. "The movement itself has brought nothing that enriches true worship."
4. "I'll start believing the truth prevails in the Charismatic Movement when its leaders start looking more like Jesus Christ."

I'm sure that some of you are shaking your heads, wondering how a leader of Pastor MacArthur's caliber could make such extreme statements (either in his *Strange Fire* book or at the Strange Fire conference).

One answer would be willful ignorance, meaning he knows what he is saying is false and yet he says it anyway. To that I can

only say God forbid. My esteem for Pastor MacArthur and my commitment to walk in love toward him does not allow me to consider this possibility even for a moment.

What then is the problem? If it is not willful ignorance, then it must be a blind spot—a great, big blind spot, one that is so large that it does not allow him (or those who follow in his footsteps) to see these issues clearly.

In *Authentic Fire*, I take almost 35 pages to expose this blind spot. Let me take a few paragraphs here to address the first of these four claims, touching very briefly on the last three claims at the end of this article.

Have **charismatics**, as such, made real contributions to biblical clarity, interpretation and sound doctrine? Absolutely!

Of course, one could immediately challenge the idea that the positive contributions of **charismatic** scholars and theologians *as charismatics* can somehow be separated from the positive contribution of charismatic scholars and theologians in general.

This would be like discounting most (or all) of the positive contributions of cessationist scholars and theologians since, it could be argued, they did not primarily make those contributions *as cessationists*. Not only so, but this line of thinking actually produces a false dichotomy, as if you can easily separate one's theology and spiritual experience from the whole of one's life—be it in biblical interpretation, theology, worship, acts of service or character.

Still, let's answer this question on Pastor MacArthur's terms, since it can easily be demonstrated that charismatics *as such* have made wonderful contributions to biblical interpretation, theology and sound doctrine.

To this day, the most widely read devotional is *My Utmost for*

His Highest by Oswald Chambers. What many readers do not know is that the transforming experience for Chambers as a *believer* was being **baptized in the Spirit**, and from 1907-1910, he was a traveling speaker and representative of the Pentecostal League of Prayer.

Go back and read Chambers again, noting the depth of his spiritual penetration, his exaltation of Jesus and his pointing to the work of the Spirit, and recognize that this beloved author believed in the baptism of the Spirit and ministered as a Pentecostal, although he opposed division over the question of tongues.

And how about **A.W. Tozer**, read more today than he was in his lifetime, famous for extraordinarily rich books like *The Knowledge of the Holy*?

Tozer was mentored by F.F. Bosworth, author of *Christ the Healer* and an early **Pentecostal** leader who was touched at Azusa Street, and Tozer believed the gifts of the Spirit were for God's people today.

It was Tozer who once wrote, "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference."

This makes much more sense now.

In the realm of biblical scholarship, some of the world's foremost New Testament scholars speak in tongues (and/or affirm the gifts of the Spirit for today), including Gordon Fee, Craig Keener, Ben Witherington, Peter H. Davids, and N.T. Wright. (Wright described tongues as being "like a private language of love.") There is no question that their spiritual experiences have enhanced their scholarship (think of Fee on 1 Corinthians or on the Holy Spirit in Paul; think of Keener on

Acts or on miracles, past and present; think of Davids on healing in 1 Peter and James [Jacob]).

And then there are leading philosophers like J.P. Moreland, committed to integrating rigorous intellectualism with the power of the Spirit, and scholars like Wayne Grudem, general editor of the ESV, whose theological studies include an emphasis on continuationism. (In fact, the emphasis on the continuance of the gifts of the Spirit is an important doctrinal contribution by the Charismatic Movement.)

This is just the tip of the iceberg, but it is enough to expose this massive blind spot in the Strange Fire camp.

As for the question of “Where is the charismatic hospital?” how about Calcutta Mercy Hospital, founded by Pentecostal missionaries Mark and Huldah Buntain, serving 100,000 needy Indian patients every year? This is actually one of countless charismatic hospitals and ministries of mercy.

And what of Teen Challenge, a ministry of compassion birthed in the Spirit and carried on by the Spirit? (Again, the list is almost endless.)

As for the charge that the Charismatic Movement has made no real contribution to worship (!), just think of Hillsong or the Vineyard or even Jack Hayford himself (author of “Majesty”), just to mention a very few out of many.

As for the charge that charismatics need to look more like Jesus before their truth claims can be taken seriously, think of Corrie ten Boom of *Hiding Place* fame, one of the most beloved, godly women of the 20th century and a committed, tongues-speaking **charismatic**—and she is one of millions.

You can read more in the *Authentic Fire* book, but enough has been said here to render this great, big blind spot exposed.

And that is good news, not bad news, since all this is to the

glory of God, not man, with the help of the Spirit and for the good of the world and the church.

Rather than argue about it, we should rejoice.

(Print versions of the book are only available through our ministry at .)

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