

Gullibility, the Great Sin of the Charismatic Church

As I write these words, I am literally on my knees, praying as I write.

I am more burdened than angry, more broken than frustrated.

How can we be so foolish?

I am an unashamed Pentecostal/charismatic believer, a lifelong tongues speaker (since Jan. 24, 1972), one of the four principal leaders who served in the Brownsville Revival, the author of an in-depth, scholarly treatment of divine healing, the man who wrote *Authentic Fire* in response to Pastor John MacArthur's *Strange Fire*.

I am an insider, not an outsider, and for me, the Bible is a charismatic book from cover to cover, undeniably so. In fact, from 1977 to early 1982, during a season of spiritual coldness and intellectual pride, I tried to deny the things of the Spirit, wanting to distance myself from what I felt were the abuses and errors of the Pentecostal movement. But the testimony of the Word was too clear for me to deny and the Spirit's work in my life too strong for me to resist.

Yet I am terribly ashamed of our folly, our gullibility, our lack of discernment, our failure to test all things by the Word, our carnality and our openness to being duped, deceived and defrauded.

With good reason, men like Pastor MacArthur have taken aim at us, even if their criticisms were unbalanced and inaccurate. We provided them with all too many worthy targets.

God, help us!

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For you permit it if a man

brings you into bondage, if a man devours you, if a man takes from you, if a man exalts himself, or if a man strikes you on the face" (2 Cor. 11:20).

That sounds like so many of us.

Quite a few years ago, I had to stop watching certain Christian TV shows (or even networks) because of the corrupt fundraising that would take place, as biblical holy days were exploited for sacrificial offerings and manipulative fundraisers worked their magic. (I'm not mentioning names here because I've tried to reach out to some of these men privately and will do so again before saying more.)

I once saw a well-known fundraiser preaching passionately on Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, only to turn his powerful message into a plea for funds. What a repulsive perversion of this sacred time in the Savior's life.

The fact that this kind of stuff "works" means nothing to me. On the contrary, it only adds to the culpability of the fundraiser and of the network using his services.

Shame on them all for their actions.

Last year, a strong critic of the charismatic movement wrote to me with respect and grace, almost pleading with me to denounce what he had just seen on TV.

A "prophet" made an appearance on a well-known Christian program, declaring that there would be a devastating disaster that would take place in the next month but that all who gave \$1,000 would be spared from that disaster, along with their families, including even their grandchildren.

This is an abomination, and it is in complete violation of the letter and spirit of prophetic ministry in the Bible. In fact, according to some of the earliest teaching of the church outside of the New Testament itself, any prophet claiming to

speak in the Spirit and saying, "Give me money" is a false prophet (see the Didache, Chapter 11).

And the prophesied disaster never took place, adding to the fraud.

But has this fundraiser been called to account for this by his TV network? Has the leader who hosted him been confronted on this?

Perhaps something was said behind the scenes—I would certainly hope so; I wrote to one of the people involved myself—but nothing was repudiated publicly, and the corrupt game just goes on and on.

In the words associated with circus showman P.T. Barnum (said either by him or about him), "There's a sucker born every minute."

This holds true in our "Spirit-filled" circles.

There are preachers on television today who were either exposed or sued for their fraudulent practices (like claiming to receive "words of knowledge" about audience members while the information was actually being relayed via a hidden earpiece), and yet they're still on the air, raking in their money and providing "testimonies" galore to validate their work.

When will we learn?

It's one thing for a leader to confess his sin, to be repentant and to be restored.

It's another thing for the same person to keep fleecing the flock over and over again without enough people catching on to put him out of business.

The same "prophet" who got people to "sow" \$1,000 into the famous leader's ministry to be protected from the disaster

that never came spoke at a megachurch asking the congregants to sow \$49 into his ministry. If they did so, he assured them, their cupboards would not be bare when famine comes to our land.

I'm sure the offering was massive that day.

To be clear, I believe in sowing and reaping, I believe that God is an abundant provider, and I do not believe that being poor is a sign of spirituality or that the less we have, the holier we are.

But I absolutely oppose "prophetic" manipulation, and for those promising riches to everyone who will plant a sacrificial "seed" in their ministry, I remind you of Paul's strong words about those "who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain" (1 Tim. 6:5, NIV).

I have no doubt that God in His mercy honors the simple faith of sincere believers who feel "prompted" to give and who do so out of love for God and His servants. And many times, the Lord will work miracles on their behalf, their stories being used to fuel the fire of the next mega-offering.

But for every one person with a testimony like this, there are 10 or 100 or 1,000 who did not see their mortgage cancelled or their debt wiped out or their finances exponentially increased, despite the promises of the super-anointed, charismatic preacher.

As a leader myself on radio and television, I strongly encourage believers to get behind the ministries that feed them along with giving strong support to their home congregations first. And I do believe that the laborer is worthy of his (or her) hire.

But the heart of our Father must grieve when He sees His children running to the altar, throwing their offerings at the

feet of the “man of God” while shouting, “Money cometh to me!”

Did Jesus shed His blood for this?

I stated in my *Authentic Fire* book that noncharismatics are to be commended for being careful not to be duped and misled, but they often display a cynical, skeptical spirit, which is a weakness. Charismatics, on the flip side, are to be commended for being willing to step out in faith, but we often display an extreme gullibility.

It is high time for this nonsense to stop, beginning with each of us reading this article (me included) searching our own hearts and lives.

I’m totally for taking the leap of faith and diving into the deep waters of obedience, but by God’s grace, I will do so with my eyes wide open and my feet planted firmly on the Word of God.

There is a vast difference between faith and foolishness.