

Dr. Michael Brown Goes Toe-to-Toe With Pastor John MacArthur

***Editor's Note:** Author Frank Viola sat down with Michael Brown to discuss his latest book, *Authentic Fire*. Viola gave Charisma News permission to reprint the interview. You can visit Frank Viola's blog at [.](#)*

Holyfield vs. Tyson.

Ali vs. Foreman.

Leonard vs. Durán.

All examples of two titanic powers going at it with all of their high-voltage prowess.

In Michael Brown's brand-new, hot-off-the-presses book *Authentic Fire*, Brown goes nose-to-nose with John MacArthur and excoriates his arguments in *Strange Fire*.

Authentic Fire by Brown is a book that every charismatic, every cessationist and every continuationist will want to have in their library.

Because I like Michael's book so much, endorsing it glowingly, I interviewed Michael Brown on his powerful new book.

Frank Viola: Michael, Tell us why you felt motivated to write this book.

Michael Brown: The writing of this book came as quite a surprise to me, but based on what I'm hearing from readers, it has really met a major need.

Back in June 2013, people began asking me about an upcoming conference on "Strange Fire" that would be hosted by pastor

John MacArthur. When I read some of the articles and listened to some of the promotional sound bites, I was absolutely shocked, as the level of attack coming against my charismatic brothers and sisters was troubling.

To be perfectly clear, as a charismatic myself, I've addressed charismatic abuses for decades—this is well documented in *Authentic Fire*—but the charges being raised by Pastor MacArthur were, in my opinion, far more harmful than helpful. And so, feeling prompted by the Lord, I began to write articles on the subject, addressing him respectfully and with appreciation for his many fine labors but asking for face-to-face dialogue while responding publicly to his public charges.

Some of the articles went viral, including one on the eve of the Strange Fire conference (by that time I had received an advance copy of Pastor MacArthur's *Strange Fire* book), to the point that one session at the conference (which was held in October) was devoted largely to responding to concerns I had raised.

Now, the thought had previously occurred to me that I might write a 30- to 40-page response to the *Strange Fire* book and release it as an e-book, but nothing more than that. Then, the day the conference started, I was flooded with requests—including one from a publisher—asking me to write a full-length response (and more) to *Strange Fire* and to produce an e-book as soon as possible.

In my spirit, I knew this was the Lord, and so, after finishing another writing project, I spent three intensive weeks writing, often working until close to 5 a.m., also getting some great contributions from Craig Keener and Sam Storms and others. Less than one month after that, the e-book was out, and, to my delight, the publisher arranged to have print-on-demand books made available through my ministry. And so, the paperback version of the book (about 420 pages) was also on my desk in a matter of weeks. What a wonderful

whirlwind it has been!

Viola: How is your book different from other books on the same subject?

Brown: Actually, there are no other books that cover this same ground, since:

1) *Authentic Fire* responds directly and in depth to Pastor MacArthur's charges, but graciously and with a heart for unity.

2) The book documents how charismatics and Pentecostals have addressed abuses in our movement for years, providing many eye-opening quotes from some prominent leaders.

3) The book contains a lengthy chapter making a case for the ongoing manifestation of the Spirit's gifts, called "Sola Scriptura and Therefore Charismatic." Readers have said this part of the book helped them more than anything.

4) *Authentic Fire* exposes the genetic fallacy of "An early leader in your movement sinned and held to wrong beliefs; therefore, your whole movement is corrupt." This chapter is also quite an eye-opener.

5) The book documents how professing believers in the past literally killed each other over doctrinal differences and calls us to learn from their errors.

6) *Authentic Fire* invites readers to experience God for themselves in a fresh new way, using Scripture and quotes from noted leaders.

7) The book gives a constructive way forward in the midst of our differences.

8) Everything is carefully documented, and the book uses as many online references as possible, meaning that the e-book links instantly to these sources.

So, all in all, having read widely in these areas, I believe the book is unique.

Viola: Give us two or three insights from the book that would be helpful to all Christians, both charismatic and non-charismatic.

Brown: One of the most interesting chapters in the book is called "Spirit and Truth, Right Brain and Left Brain," and it explains how charismatics and cessationists often see things through very different eyes. This insight was really helpful to me, enabling me better to understand my non-charismatic colleagues and highlighting our respective strengths and weaknesses.

So, for example, the charismatic believer is more likely to be a person willing to hear God's voice and step out in faith, but a weak side of this would be gullibility. The non-charismatic believer is more likely to be sober and circumspect in faith, but a weak side of this would be skepticism and cynicism. I list numerous illustrations like this in the chapter, and readers are finding it very helpful.

Another useful insight for all readers is to point out that we often use a double standard, condemning those we differ with for their errors or shortcomings while excusing those we agree with for similar (or worse!) errors or shortcomings. It's incumbent on us to use equal weights and measures and to mix our zeal for truth with love for the body.

One more insight for all readers is the depth to which our Father wants to have real fellowship with us by His Spirit. This is hardly limited to charismatics! Jesus longed to eat His last meal with His disciples, and that expresses God's desire for our friendship. Sometimes the very thought of that blows me away.

Viola: Why should a charismatic Christian read your book?

Brown: This is a must-read for all charismatics for several reasons:

1) It's a great time for honest introspection, examining the recent charges against us in a constructive way and calling us to step higher where appropriate.

2) It's important that charismatic Christians have a deeper, biblical basis for their beliefs and practices.

3) Reading the book will greatly edify and encourage them—the appendixes to the book, written by other authors, personally edified and encouraged me—especially when they see what God is doing by His Spirit worldwide.

4) *Authentic Fire* will actually give them a greater love and appreciation for their non-charismatic brothers and sisters.

Viola: Why should a non-charismatic Christian read your book?

Brown: This is a must-read for all non-charismatics for several reasons as well:

1) Many non-charismatics only know of charismatics through the charges of *Strange Fire* (or through the lens of Christian networks like TBN); this book helps set the record straight.

2) *Authentic Fire* models how we can have our differences while learning from each other and honoring each other, showing the strengths and weaknesses of each side.

3) Non-charismatics will be very interested to read the “Sola Scriptura” chapter, allowing them to evaluate why they believe what they do. I've been hearing from readers and from listeners to my radio show that their views have now changed based on the scriptural evidence presented.

Viola: How can people order the book?

Brown: They can just click [here](#) to order the e-book (and begin

reading in seconds) or to order the print version (which, at present, is not available through bookstores or other vendors but just through our ministry).

And as a blessing to your blog readers, we put together a special compilation of chapters from my previous books and even relevant poems (yes, my poems!), amounting to more than 25,000 words, that we're sending out to everyone who orders *Authentic Fire* this week.

Click [here](#) to order Dr. Michael Brown's new book on Kindle or paperback, then email authenticfire@ to get his free bonus e-book.