

James Robinson: Let's Prayerfully Consider John MacArthur's Concerns

My heart breaks over what appears to be another family feud, perhaps outdoing the Hatfields and McCoys, potentially lasting longer and doing greater damage. Many are responding to **John MacArthur's** statements in a recent conference and his new book *Strange Fire*. I see those on both sides of the discussion as friends and members of God's family. I love them all.

Dr. **Mark Rutland**, founder of Global Servants and former president of Oral Roberts University, is a close friend, just as I consider Dr. MacArthur to be. Dr. Rutland's response, published in Charisma News was brilliantly written and delivered with deep concern. In love, he challenged many of MacArthur's assertions and encouraged him to provide clarity. If you think either person intended unkindness, please reconsider. I will not choose between these men or wrongly divided groups. I lift all of them up in love and prayer. Although I have witnessed believers who seem to exalt the **gifts of the Spirit** above the Giver of every good and perfect gift, I personally believe in all gifts of the Spirit.

We must learn from one another what is true and best for the family of **faith**. We do not know each other well enough and, as a result, we don't know the Father as well as we should. When we refuse to know those outside our "camp," then we don't know Him as we should. When people appear to be in disagreement, the opposing sides should carefully and prayerfully examine what God may be seeking to communicate through the other person. It must never be the desire of any person involved in a discussion to strengthen their own camp or start a new one. We must all diligently desire to see God's family strengthened and, if necessary, corrected.

God created man in His own image to live as the family of the Father, blessed by Him to wisely oversee His creation, to be fruitful, multiply and **bless** the nations of the world. Something awful happened. Man chose to believe lies and tried to be like God without God, and all hell broke loose. God sent His own Son, Jesus, to announce the good news that through Christ the Father's kingdom can be established in us, expressed through us so those outside the family would be reconciled to the Father. Praise His name, we can be family living in covenant relationship with Him.

Jesus prayed in John 17 first for oneness with the Father (redemption, salvation, born from above, of the Spirit through Christ's finished work on the cross); second, that we would be sanctified in truth (shaped by the transforming power of it, not bludgeoned or brutalized by it, damaged with it or beat up with anyone's particular view of it); then, third, perfected in unity so that the world will recognize we are truly His disciples because of our obvious love for one another. I agree with this prayer and long to see it answered in our day.

Now this debate between family members whom I love is again thrust to the forefront. How does the **family** respond in light of the Father's will, as children born again through faith in Christ? Not like some foolish believers in Corinth who were **divided** over great church leaders, saying, "I am of Paul," "I am of Cephas" or "I am of Apollos," and Paul admonished them, explaining that they were so carnal and fleshly they could not hear or comprehend spiritual truth. They were acting like carnal, flesh babies. God help us! We witness this same tendency and practice far too often in our own day.

My heart breaks. I love all who are involved, being addressed, who are concerned, hurt or convinced they are right. I see those involved in the discussion as family members—God's children. My brothers and sisters, please, let's sit together at the feet of Jesus. I love and support **John MacArthur** and

appreciate his bold, unwavering love for God and the reliable standard of His Word as the perfect measure by which believers are to be guided. At the same time, Christ did promise to send the **Holy Spirit** to guide us. We must never forget what Paul said: "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."

Like MacArthur, I have witnessed foolish extremes and excesses within the body of Christ, the **family of God**. I have seen uncontrolled emotional outbursts as well as deadly arrogance and such traditional pride people can strut while sitting down in the pews they proudly paid for. I have watched people "teach the traditions of men as the commandments of God, honoring Him with their lips while their hearts are far from Him." This lifeless, religious pretense is just as repulsive to God as excessive, foolish, childish outbursts and exaggerations.

I do not believe MacArthur means to hurt the body of Christ but seeks to address what he sees as legitimate concerns. So let's prayerfully consider his concerns. Are they things Christians should also be concerned about, learn from and even be corrected by? Please, as **God's family**, let's consider the things he addresses regardless of how wrong some may consider them to be. I pray John will prayerfully consider candid responses and speak with ever-increasing love, no matter what the rhetoric may be from family members or those outside the family, and perhaps gain greater insight and understanding in the process. We must all be careful not to paint with such a broad brush that other believers are mischaracterized or misrepresented.

When I was **praying** some time ago, I told God I knew some church leaders who were wrong about some things and needed correction. In His still, small voice, the Father said, "You want to know something that is absolutely true? You, James, need correction in many areas." I bowed my head before God and prayed, "Father, forgive me, and please shape Christ more fully in me and in others." This is my prayer now for His

family, the **church**, **Christ's body**, and for all who do not know Him. May this world in darkness soon see Jesus revealed in all of His glory because we, His family, love one another. I am learning to do this, although it is challenging, and we can only do it in the power of His Spirit.

Betty and I have been married 50 years, and we often have serious and heated discussions, but we are family in a covenant relationship, and we refuse to be divided even when disagreeing. In these exchanges, like iron sharpening iron, we gain understanding. We do not divide and seek to find more tribe members who agree with us to help us win the fight; rather, we bow before God, both of us learning and becoming stronger. We are in covenant; we are family—children of the Father.

Billy Graham advised me years ago when I criticized and challenged him because he worked with so many different Christian groups. In my bold stand for my view of truth, I was often harsh and considered by some “God’s angry man.” Billy’s response in kindness was, “I suggest you spend time with other believers you’ve been taught to avoid.” I did! The experience was transforming not only for me, but also **transforming** for those I reached out to (those outside my own camp, my basket that covered me). I believe Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. He hasn’t moved—we have! We need to move back under His shadow, filled with His Spirit and yielded to His Word.

To those in the family who feel they are being **falsely accused**: Please respond in love and kindness. Be yielded clay, and answer wisely to the benefit of Christ’s body and to the glory of God when addressing what you perceive to be a misunderstanding, while at the same time seeking wisdom concerning necessary corrections.

Miracles do still happen, but not always exactly the way we **hope**. Our family witnessed this far too closely and

personally. We believe in the Spirit-filled life and miraculous healing—"Christ the same yesterday, today and forever." I've seen glorious deliverance, blind eyes opened, crippled limbs straightened, tumors disappear, and we've also lost our daughter, Robin, who had more faith in God's healing power than anyone I've ever known—but her complete healing came in the arms of Jesus three days after Christmas last year. Christmas will never be the same for our family, but the Christ of Christmas will be. It is this Christ I love to hold up before the family of faith and prayerfully plead that we love one another, even in heated discussions, so the world will know we are His disciples by the way we respond to one another.

Can you believe some Christians have said Robin would have been healed if she had just had enough **faith** or if she had never asked a physician's advice or if we had just believed enough or prayed enough? Thanks—as if we didn't already hurt enough, now we get Job's comforters. But it's OK. We still love those who say foolish things, because they are family or could become family members. We are not going to become their accusers. We will love them and pray. Please remember, we are not perfect. At best, we are being perfected by the only perfect One. Let's encourage the process as the family of God. We can joyfully say the compassionate comforters overwhelmed us with love.

I know that just as parents do, God wants to bless His children, and He wants the best for them. But the wise parent knows just having more stuff is not always a blessing; it can become a curse. We know that God promises abundance of life but not necessarily abundance of material things. There is no reliable monetary standard of measure. That's a dishonest, false scale. True prosperity is living life richly, not necessarily with riches. Even God's people say things they intend well but are painfully wrong and better not said or at least stated with more wisdom. We would all gain by simply

looking at God in His creation the same way we consider our own children, brothers and sisters. Family members still do silly things and make mistakes. Even our grandchildren do, but they are still family. Why can't **Christians** and church leaders recognize this reality and begin behaving like family members who are imperfect but seeking to follow a perfect Savior and Father?

I don't know if I'm truly **godly** or Christlike, but I sure want to be. I'm not sure if I'm the husband, father, grandfather or minister I'm supposed to be, but with all my heart I want to become yielded clay in the Master Potter's hand. I long to be able to learn not only from those who obviously love me, but also from those who may seem to be sometimes unkind critics or appear to be my enemy. I may never be the best teacher, but I long to be the best possible student—a true disciple of Christ, led and instructed by the Holy Spirit.

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