

Why the Charismatic Church Needs to Wake Up and Deal With This Glaring Issue

“‘Trees are important, because every tree has bark, and you know a dog by its bark, and dogs are man’s best friend, and where would we be without friends, so trees are important.’”

This was how logic worked for a traveling prophet and teacher that Dr. Michael Brown encountered. His sermons were scattered, incoherent and false. Yet, he was allowed to minister at the Bible school where Dr. Brown taught.

The prophet/teacher told his students that when Jesus referred to Herod as a “fox” in Luke 13:32, He actually meant Herod was gay even though no commentaries or lexicons suggest this. Dr. Brown, having intimate knowledge of the Hebrew and familiarity with the Greek, decided to confront him. He challenged his statement along with a few other questionable ideas he taught. The man’s response was deeply disturbing.

“He told me that for years he was a basic, ABC gospel teacher, and no one came to his meetings. Now, he said, with all the Hebrew and Greek nuggets he gave them, they came flocking to hear him,” Dr. Brown relays in his book *Playing With Holy Fire: A Wake-Up Call to the Pentecostal-Charismatic Church* (Charisma House, 2018).

For Dr. Brown, this attitude represents a larger problem in the church. In many instances, deviance from doctrine is celebrated. Like the Athenians and foreigners described in Acts 17:21, Christians have a habit of doing nothing else than “either telling or hearing something new.” The church craves new and edgy ideas, consequently inching away from more “antiquated” messages about holiness and prayer.

Dr. Brown heard of a preacher who based his entire ministry on a single Greek word. If that wasn't bad enough, the preacher also profoundly misunderstood and misused the word. It's as though the gospel and biblical language have become pieces of clay that ministers can shape and mold to their liking. What's shocking is that these preachers gain popularity for their radical insights.

In *Playing With Holy Fire*, Dr. Brown responds to some of the most glaring problems in the Pentecostal-charismatic church, one of which is doctrinal error. Although these issues are also alive and well in other denominations, Dr. Brown identifies three reasons why charismatics in particular are more susceptible.

"First, we often contrast the mind with the Spirit, as if the two were always at war and as if we have to turn off our minds in order to believe God. Second, it's part of our Pentecostal history to despise seminary training and intellectual approaches to the Bible, because of which many of our leaders are lacking in solid biblical education. Third, we believe the Spirit is still speaking today, which opens us up to the possibility of basing doctrine on extra-biblical revelation," Dr. Brown writes.

He sees spiritual gullibility as a significant weakness in the church. Ministries arm their marketing platforms with Scripture in an effort to manipulate Christians into giving. Ministry leaders who have been caught in fraudulent activities continue to lead financially prosperous ministries and maintain large followings. Christians are misled to believe prophetic words that are delivered with no accountability and are dangerously inaccurate.

Dr. Brown sounds a wake-up call to Christians, not as a critic of the Pentecostal-charismatic tradition but as a fellow charismatic who longs to see the church grow, flourish and fulfill God's kingdom purposes. However, in order for this to

happen, Christians need to address these attitudes and behaviors that are harming the church.

He points to figures in the Bible such as Abraham, Elijah, Daniel, Peter and Paul: "They were men of great faith, but they were anything but gullible. They believed what *the Spirit* said, not what *any spirit* said. They knew the difference between a word from above and a word from below, the difference between their human emotions and the leading of the Lord."

Dr. Brown's book *Playing With Holy Fire* does more than expound on the problems in the church. It encourages believers to lean into the strengths that are characteristic of the Pentecostal-charismatic church, such as evangelism. Dr. Brown highlights how the wildfire spread of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement proves that the Holy Spirit is moving mightily among the people of God. Because of this, it's even more imperative to save the church from doctrinal deviance.

"As Jesus said, 'To whom much is given ... much shall be required (Luke 12:48),' " says Dr. Brown. "Surely much has been given to us." {eoa}

This article is based on Playing With Holy Fire (Charisma House 2018) by Michael L. Brown, Ph.D. Brown is founder and president of AskDrBrown Ministries. He served as a leader in the Brownsville Revival from 1996–2000, out of which was birthed the FIRE School of Ministry, which has sent Spirit-filled missionaries around the globe. He is host of the nationally syndicated daily talk radio show The Line of Fire—"your voice of moral, cultural, and spiritual revolution"—as well as the host of shows on GOD TV, NRBTv, METV and INI TV. His syndicated columns appear on many leading websites, and his scholarly publications range from biblical commentaries to articles in Semitic journals and theological dictionaries. He has also served as a visitor or adjunct professor at seven leading seminaries.