

Strange Fire Recap: Day One

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John MacArthur – “Strange Fire”

Strange Fire launched Wednesday morning with John MacArthur explaining the basis and the need for the conference. Starting with the story of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10), he described the dangers of fraudulent worship and the vital need for discernment, the lack of which is “the biggest problem in the church today.” The purpose of the conference then is to help the church discern the truth about the charismatic movement, which he said has made no contribution to biblical clarity, interpretation, or sound doctrine.

John closed by highlighting the true work of the Holy Spirit—conforming believers to Christlikeness. Working through the life of Christ, he showed that the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit is the model for the Spirit’s work in the life of every believer. Put simply, the Spirit’s work is to mature, sustain, empower, fill, and perfect us toward the likeness of our Savior.

Joni Eareckson Tada – Testimony

To begin the second session, John MacArthur introduced his longtime friend Joni Eareckson Tada. Joni has been paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair for more than four decades, and she explained how the Lord has used her suffering in that time to grow her spiritually. She once longed for a miraculous healing, like the person at the pool of Bethesda in John 5. And while she obviously has not received that kind of healing, she’s thankful for how the Lord has healed her spiritually in the midst of the suffering she’s endured. She said she wouldn’t exchange God’s sanctifying work for any amount of walking.

R.C. Sproul – “Undervaluing Pentecost”

Even though R.C. Sproul was unable to make to the conference in person, he appeared via video as Strange Fire’s second keynote speaker. Dr. Sproul traced the work of the Holy Spirit throughout redemptive history, leading up to the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out and indwelt all believers. His major complaint with his charismatic friends is not that they are overly fixated with Pentecost, but that they actually have a *low* view of Pentecost. Instead of recognizing that the Holy Spirit fully indwells a believer once, they’ve created a false, two-tiered system of Christianity.

Steve Lawson – “Calvin’s Critique of Charismatic Calvinists”

Steve Lawson opened the third session by asking the question, “What would John Calvin say about the wave of new Calvinists who are ‘open but cautious’ to the charismatic movement?” To answer that question, he looked back at how Calvin dealt with similar controversial movements in his own time. Working through Calvin’s *Institutes* and his commentaries, Dr. Lawson showed how Calvin

understood the apostolic gifts as validation of the apostolic message. He made it clear that Calvin saw no need for the gospel to be revalidated—just faithfully preached. He summed up the session by saying, “If we want to see a new reformation this day, and the revival of Reformed theology continually expand the borders of its influence, we must be exclusively committed to the written word of God.”

Conrad Mbewe – “The African Import of Charismatic Chaos”

Wrapping up day one, Zambian pastor and author Conrad Mbewe challenged the audience regarding the international exportation of the charismatic movement. “The Spurgeon of Africa” spoke about the charismatic chaos in His part of the world, and revealed the true nature of the massive church growth in Africa. He explained how the charismatic church has ignored the Word of God in favor of cultural superstition and prosperity preaching, and that what looks like revival from our perspective is not actually good news. Bible teaching is scarce, and Scripture does not shape the lives of many professing believers. Focusing on Christ's words in John 17:17, Mbewe passionately emphasized the inability of believers to grow spiritually apart from the teaching of God's Word.

That's just a brief glimpse of Day One. We hope you'll check out other media from the Strange Fire conference [here](#).

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