

Calling Out the Wolves

Scripture: Romans 16:17–18; Titus 1:9

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In the final chapter of *Strange Fire*, titled “An Open Letter to My Continuationist Friends,” John MacArthur outlines several dangerous ramifications of the continuationist position. The first of those dangers is that “the continuationist position gives an illusion of legitimacy to the broader Charismatic Movement” (p. 234).

We recently saw why that warning was fitting when Dr. Michael Brown spent a week as a guest on Benny Hinn’s daily television program, *This Is Your Day*. Brown is a charismatic and is widely regarded as a first-rate apologist and Old Testament scholar. Hinn, of course, is a world-renowned charlatan who has conned untold millions of dollars from followers through his prosperity preaching and faith-healing ministry.

Brown has been one of the most vocal critics of the *Strange Fire* book and conference. His chief complaint is that John MacArthur and the other speakers at Strange Fire last October “painted with too broad a brush,” not always drawing a clear line of demarcation between the rank charismatic charlatans on TBN and more cautious charismatics like him. Now, just a few short weeks later, it seems incongruous that Brown would openly and unashamedly align himself with a noisome prosperity preacher and overtly avaricious swindler such as Hinn. But there you have it.

The topic of discussion on Hinn’s programs was how to find Christ in the Old Testament. Hinn exhibited all the decorum of a small child at a magic show as Brown worked book by book through the Old Testament, giving examples of appearances of Christ along with several instances of Messianic foreshadowing and typology. While Brown’s scholarship and recall were impressive, any lasting value was robbed by Hinn’s incessant interruptions. Hinn repeatedly reduced what could have been an enlightening, encouraging discussion of the gospel to a sideshow of theological novelties. In short, it was a fiasco.

Hinn’s television program reportedly has as many as twenty million viewers per day. Whether any of them came away from the Michael Brown episodes with any legitimate spiritual fruit is a mystery. What *is* certain is that a significant portion of that viewing audience sees no difference between Brown and Hinn. In fact, Brown’s obvious expertise only lent a false credibility to Hinn and the vaguely orthodox statements he made throughout the week. Brown’s guest appearances will also make it significantly harder for him to confront Hinn’s obvious abuses and heresies.

Rather than accepting Hinn’s flattery and defending his decision to share the stage with a notorious heretic, Brown ought to be using his influential position within the charismatic movement—including his nationally syndicated daily radio program—to *call out* false teachers like Benny Hinn.

But confronting theological error is scarce in Charismatic circles. While many within the movement readily acknowledge the presence of false prophecies, phony apostolic gifts, and heretical theology, there are very few who actually step up to confront those obvious errors. That passive stance

contradicts repeated instructions in Scripture for pastors and church leaders to be on the lookout, ready to protect God's sheep from spiritual wolves (Matthew 7:15-20; Acts 20:29-31; Romans 16:17-18; Titus 1:9).

Brown himself has dismissed the need for such confrontation, writing the following in one of his [earliest criticisms](#) of *Strange Fire*:

If a pastor is shepherding his flock and feeding them God's Word and his people are not guilty of these abuses or watching these TV preachers, why is it his responsibility to address these errors?

Does Brown realize that his appearance on Benny Hinn's show served as an overt *encouragement* to "his people" to tune in to one of the worst "TV preachers" of all time?

Sadly, Brown is not alone in his sentiments. Plenty of charismatics are incredulous at the thought that they have a responsibility to police their movement. Charismatic blogger Adrian Warnock [tweeted](#) his reaction during the Strange Fire conference: "If we researched & criticised all the crooks, cons, and cookies in the Charismatic Movement we'd have no time for anything else."

Indeed. That's the very point we are making. What Warnock and others like him fail to realize is that their argument is self-refuting and self-perpetuating. The overabundance of "crooks, cons, and cookies" in the charismatic movement is a direct result of the epic failure of charismatic leaders to warn about false teachers—blended with a truckload of doctrines, practices, and superstitions that undermine the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Sadly, by refusing to protect the sheep, Warnock is accommodating the wolves—making the charismatic movement an even more noxious breeding ground for error and confusion.

In fact, when it comes to outlandish faith healers and prophets, Warnock—like many leading charismatics—openly advocates what he calls the ["Gamaliel approach."](#) Gamaliel was an unbelieving Pharisee who counseled his underlings to stop harassing the apostles of the early church and let time determine the validity of their ministry (Acts 5:33-39). Essentially, Warnock prefers the *pharisaical* response to apostolic teachers over the *apostolic* response to false teachers. It's a wait-and-see attitude that allows charismatics to overlook the worst examples of unbiblical doctrine and practice in their movement without ever openly disavowing them.

That's not what a true shepherd does.

On that point God's Word is inescapably clear: The responsibility of the shepherd is to identify the wolves and protect the sheep. Embracing and executing that responsibility in wisdom, grace, and conviction is one of the distinguishing marks of a true shepherd. It indicates the difference between those who truly love the flock, and those who are mere hirelings (cf. Matthew 10:12-13).

Over the next several days, we're going to examine some of the key passages in Scripture that describe the pastor's protective role, and revisit some of John MacArthur's landmark teaching on this vital aspect of spiritual leadership and pastoral ministry.

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