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Setting the Record Straight on the Work of the Holy Spirit
Selected Scriptures
GTY137

PHIL: Hi, I'm Phil Johnson, executive director of Grace to You, and I'm here with John MacArthur today. John, we want to talk about the Charismatic Movement.

JOHN: Good. I'm happy to do that.

PHIL: It's been exactly 20 years since your book, "Charismatic Chaos" was published. And in the intervening years, I can't think of a single significant, biblical critique of the Charismatic Movement that's been published. There may have been a few, but they weren't highly publicized. It's been an issue that's kind of been set on the backburner. If you think about the past 20 years, you've had a lot of mass movements like Promise Keepers, and Together for the Gospel, and The Gospel Coalition, that have brought together Charismatics and non-Charismatics. And nowadays, it's almost as if there's a moratorium on that issue. It's not discussed or debated. Have we lost the debate?

JOHN: Well, we've given up. We've conceded. In the early years of the Charismatic Movement, they demanded acceptance, and they were hostile. I remember Benny Hinn saying on TBN one night, about me, that if he had his way, he'd take out his Holy Ghost machine gun and blow my brains out. So, they were very hostile and aggressive. They wanted acceptance in the mainstream of Evangelicalism. And they basically got it. The Evangelicals rolled over and let them come in and you're exactly right, the collective kind of ministries, the big ministries that create big events don't discriminate, the publishers don't discriminate. They publish the range of things from the most radical, bizarre, Charismatic stuff to the most sound biblical stuff on the other end. So, yeah, they have managed to come in and plant themselves in the midst of Evangelicalism, and Evangelicalism has to widen its definition to embrace them.

And you and I have talked about this before: the Evangelical Movement in the last 20 years has risen in force to protect attacks on God the Father. You know, the openness of God theology, that theology that came and said God is not omniscient, He doesn't know the future, He can't know the future. He's trying to figure it out like everybody else. There was a massive reaction to that and books were written, and articles were written and we defended God. And the same can be true of Christ. If anything distinguishes the last 20 years of the Evangelical Movement, it is clarity on the gospel and a relentless clarity on the gospel, which means the deity of Christ, the person of Christ, all the essential components of soteriology, the significance of the cross, and His death; it's the gospel, the gospel, the gospel.

PHIL: And that's a good thing, right?

JOHN: Well, yeah, defending God the Father and defending God the Son, absolutely we must do that. But in the same 20 years, the Holy Spirit has been assaulted and abused in a massive way, and nobody says anything. There is no outrage from people who have been outraged about the attacks on the Father and the Son, there seems to be no outrage on these horrific assaults on the Holy

Spirit. In fact, I recently told our congregation that in Matthew 12, Jesus accused the Pharisees of attributing the works of the Holy Spirit to Satan. And He said, “That’s the unpardonable sin.” You’ve attributed the works of the Holy Spirit done through Me to Satan. Today, the Charismatic Movement attributes the work of Satan to the Holy Spirit. It’s just a flip.

PHIL: But it’s a different way of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

JOHN: It is blasphemy. The things that they attribute to the Holy Spirit are outrageous. Where is the hostility? Where is the rising defense against these attacks on the Holy Spirit? That’s the compelling question.

PHIL: You almost get the impression that the Evangelical consensus currently is that this is really not that important of an issue. It’s one of those second-tiered things that we really just shouldn’t debate about.

JOHN: Yeah, and that would be the very obvious conclusion: it doesn’t matter. We did a little bit of research looking back, and we couldn’t find a definitive book dealing with these issues until we went back into the early 1990s. We’re talking about at least 15 years, maybe more, since anything has come out definitively. You’ve mentioned “Charismatic Chaos,” and you’re right. That continues to be the only book that sweeps across all the issues in the Charismatic Movement and tries to address them biblically.

PHIL: And yet it deals with issues that really aren’t a problem anymore. You’ve got several Charismatic fads: the Toronto Blessing and the Kansas City Prophets and that, that are dealt with extensively in “Charismatic Chaos,” and they’re not really around anymore.

JOHN: Well, the Kansas City Prophets haven’t gone anywhere.

PHIL: Yeah, they’ve changed their name.

JOHN: They’ve resurfaced and now they’re called The New Apostolic Reformation. They have a new name, it’s the same people, with a few more thrown in like Cindy Jacobs and other radical strange people. So, they don’t go away. You know, you could almost say the only thing that’s changed is you’d have different illustrations. Their theology hasn’t changed. But they’ve gotten away with this. They’ve gotten away with heresy. They’ve gotten away with blasphemy, to say nothing of the horrific prosperity gospel which just has flooded that movement, that Jesus wants you healthy, and rich and successful and fulfill all your dreams.

I mean, it reaches to the self-confessed pastor of America, Joel Osteen, who is commanding crowds of 75,000 people or whatever, 50,000 people in Yankee Stadium and stadiums across the country. And he’s spouting the Charismatic line that you have enough power that you can create your own world, you can create your own future, you can write the script for whatever you want, you can determine your own prosperity and success by verbalizing it. He’s the worst of that, and yet his popularity is massive and people are very undiscerning about it. So, from our standpoint, it’s time to rise in an act of outrage, I think; to, I don’t want to say “protect,” because that’s not my job, but to give honor to the Holy Spirit in the way He deserves to be honored.

PHIL: Now, there is a difference, is there not, between a Charismatic who teaches the prosperity gospel, and someone who would stand on the same side of that line as us and defend a biblical gospel?

JOHN: There are Charismatics who would reject the prosperity gospel. They, however, don't have a theology that can protect them from the prosperity gospel. And I say that because Charismatics, by definition, believe in continuing revelation. They believe that the Lord is still speaking, that God talks to people all the time, Jesus talks to people, He gives divine revelations. You hear this all the time. So, by what criteria then do you deny the prosperity gospel? How do you tell somebody, "Well, I'm sorry, God didn't tell you that. The Lord didn't tell you that if you speak words of faith, you know, you'll activate your own future and make yourself rich?" So how do you deny that if you give space to that? And that speaks to the issue of cessationism. You have well-respected theologians who are non-cessationists. That is, they think that the gift of prophecy and wisdom and knowledge from God and some sort of revelation is still going on, still going on. So, as long as there's a place for that, it becomes very difficult to contain what people claim is the Word of God.

PHIL: Yeah, that strikes me as really the hub of the matter.

JOHN: It is.

PHIL: Are we cessationists? Are we continuationists? Give us a little more thorough definition of those two terms. What is a continuationist, and what is a cessationist, and which are you?

JOHN: Well, let's start with the cessationist. That would be me. That's not a biblical word, but it draws out of 1 Corinthians 13, "Whether there be tongues, they shall cease. Prophecy, it shall cease." So, we believe it has. We believe that in the New Testament, it is clear that there was a period of divine revelation, there was a period of miracles, and it was connected to the apostles, the apostolic period, the signs of an apostle are these, signs and wonders and mighty deeds. Those are the signs of an apostle, that when the apostles in their era passed away, the miracle signs passed away. The purpose of miracles, and by the way, you need to make clear to people that you can't look back at redemptive history from the beginning of Revelation to today and just see endless miracles. That is not accurate. There have been very, very rare occasions in the whole history of redemption, the whole of biblical history when miracles happened. Very, very rare. There are miracles of judgment, serious miracles of judgment that flow through, say, the Old Testament. But as far as miracles, the way people would define them, that heal people or whatever, they're just very, very rare, even in the Old Testament, very isolated.

You come to the New Testament and there's an explosion of miracles for the purpose of pointing to Christ as the Messiah. I mean, there are teachers running all over the place in Israel: how do we know Jesus is telling the truth? Well, God attested Him by miracles. That's what He was doing. How do we know the apostles are preaching a true representation of the work of Christ? Because they were attested by miracles. They then, and those associated with them, write down the revelation of God in Scripture. The book of Revelation ends, if you add anything to this, shall be added the plagues that are written. Jude says, this is the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The apostolic era ends, Revelation ends with the book of Revelation, the gospel of John, and the epistles of John around 90 to 96 of the first century, and the canon closes, Scripture's done, miracles are done. Miracles had begun to decrease even before that.

PHIL: You can see that pattern, actually in the New Testament.

JOHN: Well, you see it in the New Testament, yeah. People are left sick in places. And obviously Timothy had some kind of problem and Paul doesn't heal him. He just says, you know, take a little wine for your stomach's sake, and it killed the bacteria with that fermented wine, it will help your health. So, you see that diminishing as the history of the New Testament goes on. And it's clear in all the instruction of the church, for the church: there's no reference to anything miraculous. The pastoral epistles, those epistles written to the churches give no place for the miraculous.

So, the point is, cessationists believe that you had a massive explosion of miracles to authenticate and validate Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Messiah, and then to validate the message of the apostles, the apostles' doctrine which then is inscripturated in the Bible. At that point, they cease. And now, we don't need miracles to attest anybody. All I need to do is compare anybody and what they teach and what they say with what the Bible says, because that's the sole authority.

Continuationists, on the other hand, believe that the gifts continue, the miracles may continue, prophecy may continue, healing may continue, and divine revelation, in some way, continues. They even go so far as to say that prophets can be speaking revelation from God newly given. Wow. Then, you have an issue, then the issue becomes, okay, if this is a revelation from God, is it equal to Scripture? And they will run to say, "Oh no, it's not equal to Scripture." Oh, wait a minute. It's not equal to Scripture, but it's a revelation from God. So, is God now giving us a sub-standard revelation?

PHIL: Yeah, and what kind of authority would a message like that have? Would I believe obliged to –

JOHN: Look, if it came from God, then it is true, then it is inerrant. If it isn't inerrant and it isn't authoritative, then it didn't come from God. And then, it's nothing but your ideas mixed with maybe some Bible verses. It's like a sermon.

PHIL: Yeah, that's always mystified me about the continuationists' position. It seems to me there are no consistent continuationists. Because if you're going to say these prophecies, these messages, aren't reliable, they're not infallible, they're not really authoritative, then what you are saying is that kind of revelation has ceased.

JOHN: Yeah, that's exactly the point. And it's the same with tongues. If God was giving this gift for purposes that are clearly laid out in the New Testament, but it was revelation, I mean, God was giving messages in languages people didn't understand, then somebody interpreted it. Then, if that's going on today, God is continuing to give revelation. God is continuing to send revelation. But we don't have any criteria to know that this is accurate, and they don't necessarily want to say it's absolutely true. So, how could it be from God? The safe ground, and I think the argument can be made from Scripture, we've made it for years in the book "Charismatic Chaos," that revelation ceased, and it ceased on all levels with the finish of the Word of God, the New Testament.

PHIL: Now, the continuationist would say, "But there's no proof text." In fact, I know people who are not Charismatics who hold to a continuationist position anyway. I don't know how you can justify that. But they look at Scripture and say, because there's no proof text. There's no simple text that says:

here's when tongues will cease and it's with the closure of the canon, or the death of the last apostle, or whatever. So, if you can't have a proof text, then I can't hold this conviction.

JOHN: Well, there is a proof text, I think, in 1 Corinthians 13, "Tongues shall cease." It says that. So, all we have to do is look and see when they ceased. And so, you look at history and they ceased, and they ceased at the end of the apostolic era, clearly. And Cleon Rogers did some great work on this many, many years ago, really an outstanding scholar, and particular on this, if people want to look up some of his material on this, very helpful to me. It ceased, period, it ceased. You find this kind of strange, incoherent babble through ancient history in some of the cultic situation. You find it in the Oracle at Delphi, and some demonic things. And by the way, even the satanic religion as Mormonism has this kind of phenomenon within it, some kind of demonic sort of counterfeit.

But, as far as what would be identified as biblical tongues, it doesn't appear again till the 20th century. It shows up in the early 1900s, and it shows up with a guy named Parham. He has no credibility as a person; immorality is a part of his life. He's a bizarre person in Topeka, Kansas, and then it moves to LA in the Azusa Street meeting with William Seymour, who was another bizarre, very odd, strange guy. And that's when tongues gets cranked again. And then, it moves through the, I guess, the horrors of that early Pentecostal Movement.

Strange personalities dominated that movement like Aimee Semple McPherson who was determined to be a fraud and a deceiver, and Kathryn Kuhlman, and all of that. So, that's when it gets regenerated. And now, the people are saying, "Well, this is of the Lord, equal to the apostolic era." It just makes no sense. It did cease. That's the point.

PHIL: Well, plus, if you compare the contemporary manifestations that people say are the gifts of tongues to what happened at Pentecost, and what's described even in 1 Corinthians, it doesn't really bear any resemblance. Those are translatable languages. What you hear today just sounds like nonsense syllables, and is there any evidence anywhere that anyone has been given a gift in modern times, to be able to speak in a language they never learned?

JOHN: No, no.

PHIL: Not a single instance of it?

JOHN: No, no. In the Book of Acts, they were speaking the wonderful works of God, and the people who knew those languages knew exactly what they were saying. And in the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul refers to the fact that that event, and any subsequent use of tongues, not only was speaking the truth from God in a language some people could understand, but, wasn't a symbol of judgment on Israel. In other words, they didn't believe when they could understand. I'm going to speak to them in a language they can't understand. So, it had both a revelation aspect to the people who understood it. And to the Jews, it was a sign of God's judgment. He was turning from them because of their unbelief.

Those purposes were fulfilled in the New Testament. You can show that from Acts, and you can show it from the book of 1 Corinthians. There is nothing today in that activity that connects in any way with those purposes.

PHIL: So, it would seem the burden of proof ought to be on the continuationists who says, “These gifts never ceased. Prove it.” And I don’t think you could possibly prove that.

JOHN: I don’t think they can either. All they can say, and this is what they continue to say, is that we think that the Holy Spirit can still do that if He chooses to do that. Even things like as bizarre as the Toronto Blessing. There were well-known, Evangelical, Reformed people going over there to see if they can get the experience that was supposedly happening. People were barking like dogs, and mooing like cows, and doing all kinds of bizarre stuff. You remember when all that was going on. And they were open to that because, you know, being open to any of it sort of makes you susceptible to all of it, because how do you eliminate anything?

PHIL: Yeah, for the record, I mean we believe the Holy Spirit is God, and He is sovereign, and He is capable of doing anything He chooses to do. But that’s not really the question, is it?

JOHN: No, the Holy Spirit does whatever He chooses to do. That’s part of being God. But when the Word of God lays out something, the way the Holy Spirit is doing it, then we have to keep it within that confine. For example, I suppose we could say, well, God is sovereign. He could save somebody in Africa another way, right? Without the gospel. God is God. You can make the same argument. God is God. Or you could say, “You know, God is God if He wants to. He can take to heaven a whole bunch of people who are atheists. He’s God, He can do that.” But those kind of hypothetical things are ridiculous, because God is always going to act consistently with Himself, and we know how He has revealed Himself. The idea that God is God so He can do what He wants, that doesn’t bring any conclusion to anything.

PHIL: Yeah, in fact it seems to me that the underlying false assumption in the Charismatic worldview is the notion that if the Holy Spirit isn’t doing miraculous and even bizarre things, He’s not working at all. He doesn’t work through ordinary means. He isn’t involved in the ordinary day-to-day things of life. So, if you deny these things, then you really don’t believe the Holy Spirit is active, how would you respond to that?

JOHN: Well, that is such a tragedy, that kind of thinking, that I recently did a, I don’t know, how many part? 13 messages or something trying to bring honor to the Holy Spirit because of the horrible dishonor that is being heaped upon Him? The Holy Spirit is accused of all kinds of satanic things, all kinds of human things. To understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit, you go to the New Testament. And the Holy Spirit is the source of divine revelation, He is the author of Holy Scripture, He is the one who illuminates the believer. We have been given the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. We have an anointing from God. It’s an amazing gift that the Holy Spirit is to us for the understanding of Holy Scripture. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, internally. The Holy Spirit drives us to Christ. The Holy Spirit helps our prayers, with groanings that can’t be uttered. The Holy Spirit secures us and gives us assurance so that we cry, “Abba Father.” The primary work of the Holy Spirit, the wondrous work, is to conforming us to Christ, making us more and more like Christ, 2 Corinthians 3:18, “from one level of glory to the next, as we gaze at Christ.” We look at the Bible, we see Christ revealed. The Holy Spirit illuminates Christ as revealed in Scripture, and then changes us into His image. These are the things the Holy Spirit is really doing.

PHIL: As you describe it there, so much of His work is to point us to Christ and to testify of Christ that it almost seems to divert to that, to portray the Holy Spirit as someone whose main ministry is to put on a spiritual fireworks display.

JOHN: Yeah, and even worse. You would think that the ministry of the Holy Spirit was primarily to conmen and charlatans, and frauds who take money from people who are victims. Is that the ministry of the Holy Spirit? To make Benny Hinn filthy rich? Furthermore, would the Holy Spirit validate Benny Hinn with signs and wonders and miracles, whose theology is aberrant, whose life is a tortured mess? Would the Holy Spirit validate Paul and Jan Crouch, whose lives are also anything but Christ-like? You know, by public knowledge. Who is the Holy Spirit validating here?

If the Holy Spirit wanted to confirm and affirm the ministry of someone, and He was going to give them power to do miraculous things, I think it would be the people who are most faithful to the Word of God. But none of those people have any of this power. They're always crazy people, bizarre people, people whose theology is more than suspect; it's known to be heretical.

PHIL: And yet there are people who are basically faithful to the Word of God who believe somehow that these gifts have gone on and whatever. Can an evil tree bear good fruit? How is it that this theology comes from the kind of source it does, and then gets into a movement like, you know, Reformed theology, people who profess to believe Scripture and preach Scripture, and yet they embrace Charismatic doctrine?

JOHN: Well, I mean, let's be honest. It's because there are people within the framework of Reformed theology, noble, good people who have made a great contribution, who don't help people see clearly the error of this. That's the point that we began this discussion. Why do some people allow this, tolerate this, and become cover? They become the cover, the shield for these people, under which they can exist with their heresy. So, I think there's a susceptibility to this because people are desperate. There's a susceptibility to miracles. People are desperate.

If you invent the prosperity gospel, do you think that's been a successful invention? Yeah, I mean, it's taken Africa by storm. It's just devastated the church in Africa, corrupted Christianity, made the worst people rich, and abused these poor people. It's a promise that is the most despicable kind of thing, to promise to desperate people: healing, health, wealth.

PHIL: And the only people who do prosper are the false teachers.

JOHN: Well, sure, because you've got to send them your money to get that. So, it's a despicable kind of thing. Do we think that this kind of thing is a true representation of the Holy Spirit? Of course not. But why don't people within the range of Reformed theology rise up in protest against this, rather than say, "Well, you know, we believe these things can continue," and just kind of let it go?

PHIL: Because there is a kind of unspoken moratorium on the controversy about that issue these days.

JOHN: You know, if there was, let's just say that if there was a Together for the Holy Spirit Conference, and 10,000 people came together and preached for four days on the true ministry of the Holy Spirit, and called down fire from heaven on all these aberrations, it would change the face of this thing.

PHIL: I'm for that. Now, let me go back to something you said quite a bit earlier, and I kind of want to

draw this in. You made, you drew a lot of parallels between revelation and the work of revealing new truth, and these apostolic signs, the miraculous gifts. These things are clearly related in Scripture.

JOHN: Well, of course, because the miracles, again, and we were talking about this earlier, the miracles were for a specific purpose. You don't have the New Testament, right? It's in the apostolic era. The New Testament isn't written. How do I know what the truth is? You know, I've got this guy coming down the pike teaching this, and teachers were all over the place. You know, go to Mars Hill, there were religions ad infinitum, ad nauseam, there were representatives of those religions. Satan had all the false teachers going in every direction. We know that because as soon as Christianity was clarified, they all began to attack that. So, who do I believe? I don't have a Bible to compare, so who do I believe? Well, I believe those who raised the dead, healed the sick, do things that cannot be explained by any natural means or any human means. And this is a validation of those early preachers, along with the person of Jesus Christ as well, and establishes that they're speaking the truth. That's why the early church, Acts 2, studies the apostles' doctrine, because they knew that what they said was revelation from God. Once the revelation from God is completed, signed, and sealed, the faith once for all delivered to the saints. A very important phrase in the Book of Jude. The canon is closed. That's it. And we all agree that the canon is closed. There are no more books being added to the Bible.

So, what is this? Are these just impulses that may or may not be true? I remember reading a book years ago by a guy who was advocating continuing revelation. And he actually said, this is a quote, "When someone stands up in your church and says, 'Thus saith the Lord,' and then gives a message, you know that it is either true, or it is not." Really.

PHIL: That's profound.

JOHN: Yeah, that is profound. And there was never anything that said how you would make the distinction.

PHIL: Yeah, I attended one of these churches once where they invite people to stand up and say, "Thus saith the Lord," and they actually had dueling prophets who gave contradictory messages, and nobody ever did or said anything to sort out who was right and who was wrong. They just left it to the people. I just don't see how that can possibly be edifying for anyone. It's not, is it?

JOHN: Well, it isn't because it's not authoritative. Look, take it a step further. You have a whole movement within Evangelical circles, a whole movement that's not even connected to the Charismatic Movement. And I guess it kind of got traction with somebody named Henry Blackaby about learning to listen for the voice of God.

PHIL: "Experiencing God" was the name of this book.

JOHN: "Experiencing God." and there were books and books and books and books that came out and trying to teach people to listen for the voice of God. Boy, there's a formula for a disaster. What mechanism do you have to know when it's God talking? You don't have a red light that goes on in your head, spinning around, "This is God." But that movement has aided and abetted. You have a very familiar language: the Lord showed me this, the Lord spoke to me about this, the Lord indicated this to me. Which is just a short step from: Jesus told me to say this, or, this is a prophecy. This stuff

is running amok, and it gets beyond the boundaries of what you could say is sort of the Charismatic Movement, because the Blackaby Movement was a huge thing in the Southern Baptist denomination, which would be about as non-Charismatic as any denomination in the country.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: But they're just rife with that, listening for the voice of God kind of stuff, where you read certain impulses as if that's some form of revelation. And they would all back off and say, "Well, it's not equal to Scripture, but, well then, what is God doing here? Is He giving us stuff He cannot trust?

PHIL: Yeah, they are actually imputing divine authority to human intuition, really.

JOHN: Yeah, I had a guy come to me Sunday morning after I had preached the sermon, and I walked over and I talked to him, and he said, "I have to tell you something." And I said, "Hey, great." I introduced myself and asked his name, and he gave me his name. He said, "I have to tell you that the Lord has told me there's going to be a really big earthquake." I said, "Really?" He said, "Do you think if I give you that prophecy that I'm crazy?" I said, "No, I don't think you're crazy. I just think you're wrong." I mean, we're in California, so there could be an earthquake. But, did the Lord tell you there's going to be an earthquake, and this is a direct prophecy? And so maybe He told you the magnitude. Did He tell you the magnitude of that, you know, like on the Richter scale while he was giving you this information? Just so if it is from God, He wouldn't get blended in to every other earthquake.

PHIL: Or the date and time would be helpful information.

JOHN: And I said that. And just, you know, like can I plan for this thing a little bit, maybe, you know, get out of my house and be outside?

He said, "Well, you don't believe that this is from God." I said, "I know it's not from God. This isn't from God. And I don't think you're crazy; I just think you're very misguided, because God doesn't give information like that to you."

But here's this guy dead serious about the fact that he has some idea I the back of his head that there's going to be an earthquake, which he's invented for, I don't know, from what sources. So these people, running around with the notion that God is passing to them divine revelation about the future events of the world. I mean, it comes back down to this: the Lord has given us His Word and it is complete. Don't add to it. Don't take away from it, or shall be added to you the plagues that are written in it. This is the Word of God. Every one of those people that goes to a Charismatic Church, everybody that goes to Joel Osteen's church walks in there with a Bible. It has a front cover, and it has a back cover. It doesn't have 48 blank pages in the back where you can stick in the latest revelations. They get it, they do that, they know that. "This is my Bible, I believe what it says." That's what Joel Osteen always says. You know, it tells me this and it tells me that. And then, they just go on from there to create the chaos of intuition being viewed as if it's divine revelation.

PHIL: Let me go back to something you said earlier and kind of drive this home. You said at the very start that miracles, even on the pages of Scripture, miracles are not every day commonplace experiences. And particularly if you look at the miracles that are done through human instrumentality,

you have, really I can think of three miracle eras: Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and then Christ and the apostles. Other than that, there are isolated miracles.

JOHN: And even the miracles that occurred in the time of Moses were very limited to those specific judgments until the massive miracle that occurred when the Lord opened the Red Sea. There were a few miracles in the life of Elijah, not massive miracles. But then you come to Jesus and it's every day. Miracles are going on for a period of three years. You've got miracles: power over disease, power over demons, power over death, power over nature, just all of these things, and they're not judgment miracles. They're miracles of blessing, eliminating disease, and demon-possession, and ending a funeral by a resurrection, and this is God's demonstration of His compassion and His love and His desire to overturn sin and its effects. And this is an attestation of Christ, the idea that they borrow that verse from Hebrews 13, "Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today, and forever." That, by the way is on most classic historic Pentecostal churches, just say if there were miracles then, there would have to be miracles now, and there would have to be miracles in the future, and it's talking about the nature of Christ, not what He did.

PHIL: Yeah, if that meant what Charismatics seem to want to try to make it mean. You have a hard time explaining the Old Testament eras when there weren't any miracles.

JOHN: I have to go back to this. When I started the "Charismatic Chaos" book, the whole point that I began with is what you've been talking to me about. It's about revelation. This is the big problem because the revelation is complete; therefore the signs that attested the source of that revelation are complete. But the thing I keep going back to is: if God was giving power to do miracles, if He was giving prophecy, wouldn't He be more selective of the people that He's giving this to? Why would He authenticate crooks, charlatans, frauds, heretics? Because those are the only people who are doing this stuff.

I have a lot of wonderful friends in the ministry. Nobody at a Ligonier Conference does signs and wonders. But they have their theology right. Nobody at a Together for the Gospel does signs and wonders. Nobody at Founder's Week at Moody Bible Institute does signs and wonders. I've traveled the world, and I've met pastors and Bible teachers all over the planet; none of them do signs and wonders. None of them have the power of miracles. None of them hear voices from God. Only these bizarre sort of media people, and the effect of it is not the clarity of Holy Scripture, not the salvation of souls, not the advance of the church, but they become wealthy and famous and powerful. And if you look at their lives, you wouldn't say that the Lord had given them the ability to do this, or is doing this through them because of their theology. Nor would you say He's doing it because of their holiness and their virtue.

So, the whole thing is so skewed. I just don't understand why there isn't a huge cry to call for a true honoring and respecting the Holy Spirit and the truth of His ministry. I just think it ought to rise, and that leads to the fact that we're going to put this in a book, right?

PHIL: Yeah, that's right. You know, I agree with you.

JOHN: I could move that book up, that's going to be the next project. Just giving you fair warning.

PHIL: Right. I agree with you. If you look at what people in the world today perceive as the most

visible face of Christianity, no matter where I go in the world, TBN has infiltrated, you see these guys and my question is, “Why is there not an outcry about that?” We get very agitated over things on the political scene here in America, the Evangelical Movement is very concerned about whose going to be the next President and all of that, and yet the airwaves are full of these false teachers.

JOHN: Yeah, and then some of the good teachers that are on these networks will sit down on one of the open conversational programs with these false teachers and talk like friends. You know, it’s one thing to have a half hour on a radio program or a television station when you’re a self-contained program saying what you want to say. It’s something else when you come out of that, and you sit down, and you’re buddy-buddy with all the false teachers. That’s a very serious situation. But I think part of the issue here can be pragmatic, that these people control a lot of the media, a lot of the Christian media are controlled by these Charismatic people, because they’ve proven that their shtick works. They get money. I mean, they fly around in their own private jets and they build bigger and bigger empires and all of this, and they’re successful at it. So, part of the reluctance to confront this is the fact that these are the people who give a voice to good Bible teachers. And so, they sort of back off. You know, they don’t want to make enemies out of the gate keepers.

My feeling is if speaking the truth got us thrown off every radio station and the very isolated television we do, so be it. I just want to bring honor to the Lord, honor to the Holy Spirit, and let the Holy Spirit decide what that means to whatever outlets we might or might not have.

PHIL: Yeah, let me bring up the issue of the sufficiency of Scripture, ‘cause I think that underlies a lot of the Charismatic desire to see miracles and tongues and all of that, almost as if what God has already said and what He’s given to us in Scripture isn’t enough. We need more. You hear Charismatics using the expressions like “fresh words of prophecy,” as if the words of Scripture are stale or something. That, to me, is one of the most significant problematic aspects of Charismatic doctrine. No matter what you say to affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, your theology, your Charismatic theology is denigrating it.

JOHN: Phil, that is such an important point. They claim to believe the Bible. They obviously don’t know what’s in it, and I mean, that’s movement-wide. They don’t preach it accurately. They don’t study it. Most all prominent media Charismatic preachers are untrained in how to handle the Word of God. They’re not theologically trained, they’re not biblically trained, they’re not linguistically trained, they wouldn’t know biblical hermeneutics from a hole in the wall. They don’t approach the Scripture correctly. They don’t have a sound theology. They’re not interested in the diligent deep study of Scripture. They do not preach it that way. They don’t interpret it that way. They play fast and loose, throwing the Bible around. So, what they convey to people is that yes, we believe the Bible, but there’s a use and abuse of the Bible to their own ends. And so the Bible doesn’t come across as authoritative anyway. It’s much less work if I can just decide that the Lord told me this and the Lord told me that, and I had an impulse about this and a feeling about that. They convey the same cavalier, superficial approach that they take to Scripture to their people.

PHIL: Now, you’re talking about the well-known media preachers, the TBN, the guys at the TBN stable and all of that. What would you say about our Reformed, Charismatic friends? John Piper, Wayne Grudem, CJ Mahaney, people like that?

JOHN: I would just say it’s the same thing I would say to anybody whose theology is incomplete. You need to close the gate on the whole picture. I say this to Reformed people a lot. How can you, how

can you ignore eschatology? How can you say, well, I don't know, you know, I don't know whether I'm amillennial, post-millennial, pre-millennial, or whatever. You need to come to a conclusion as to the truth of Scripture about that. I would say the same about ecclesiology. I would say the same about pedobaptism. Come on, go to the Word of God and come to the truth. And I would say the same to them about that issue.

I think what lingers with these really good men is a kind of revivalistic attitude. It kind of goes back to the sort of Lloyd-Jones thing, wanting an anointing from the Holy Spirit, being open to that anointing.

PHIL: It's a not so kind of subtle kind of mysticism, isn't it?

JOHN: Yeah, it is a not so subtle kind of mysticism. And I think they make an effort at making an exegetical case for it, admittedly they do. They're noble guys and friends of the truth for certain, and proclaimers of the truth. But I just, as I would anybody, as I would my own soul, wherever I fall short of a full understanding of what the Bible teaches about an area of theology, I would say it needs to be addressed. But certainly, while you're in the process of deciding whether there is still prophecy, and whether there is still some kind of revelation from the Holy Spirit, call a halt to the abuse. And we all need to rise up and say this is not the Holy Spirit, because they have the criteria to know what is patently illegitimate and unbiblical.

PHIL: Yeah, there's an inherent contradiction in the things they affirm. And the classic example, I would say, is Wayne Grudem's book on modern prophecy. He's got an appendix in there that is on the sufficiency of Scripture, which is really quite a good defense on the doctrine of biblical sufficiency. And I often tell people, read that part, read that book backwards. Start there and you won't need the rest of the book. If he had started there rather than making that doctrine an appendix, I think he would have a whole different theology.

JOHN: Yeah, that's really a very good point. You have to ask the question: what motivates the front end? Why, if you believe that about the sufficiency of Scripture and about a closed canon, well where does this other stuff come from? What is making you accommodate,

PHIL: And if it's admittedly fallible and not authoritative. Of what use is it any way? How is that any different from, you know, some intuition that –

JOHN: And how does that contribute to the clarity of the church's understanding of sound doctrine?

PHIL: It actually undermines, doesn't it? That's the problem. It undermines the clarity of God's Word. Well, thank you, John. I'm not going to keep you any longer. But I appreciate that. Just any final words of encouragement or admonition for those who are confused about this issue?

JOHN: Well, there are many, many people who seem to be confused about it that I love and admire and respect greatly. There are people at all levels of confusion. But my concern is that we at least call a halt to this false representation of the Holy Spirit that puts Him behind all these aberrations. It's time for the Evangelical church to rise up and begin to proclaim the true biblical teaching of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, equal to the way we've defended the character of God and the nature of Christ and His atonement.

PHIL: Amen.

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