

Should Type-R Charismatics Get a Free Pass?

Scripture: Romans 16:17

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Two years ago this week, Grace to You hosted the Strange Fire conference at Grace Community Church. Coinciding with the launch of John MacArthur's book Strange Fire, the conference featured a comprehensive critique of the charismatic movement and the blasphemous abuse of the Holy Spirit that goes on under its purview. While the response to the conference was overwhelming, many of the issues that were raised have yet to be seriously acted upon. Our goal is to fan the flames of this important discussion and continue the call for discernment and discipline in the charismatic movement. To that end, we want to rerun some of the important articles from before and after the conference, and encourage you to visit the [Strange Fire website](#) for all the sermons, articles, and videos from that landmark event. –GTU Staff

A prodigious [wacko fringe](#) has always been one of the charismatic movement's most prominent features. In little more than a century, the Pentecostal and charismatic movements have spun off so many bad doctrines and bizarre characters that I have [a thick dictionary](#) in my office just to help me keep track of them all.

Furthermore, I'm convinced it's not just some kind of fantastic cosmic coincidence that has loaded the movement with an unusually high number of charlatans and heretics. [I've suggested](#) on [more than one occasion](#) that a major reason the charismatic movement has produced more than its fair share of aberrant behavior is because the distinctive doctrines of charismatic belief foster gullibility while constantly seeding the movement with all kinds of whimsy. Specifically, the charismatic belief that it's normative for Spirit-filled Christians to receive extrabiblical divine revelation through various mystical means has opened the door for all kinds of mischief.

I would not for a moment deny that there are some relatively sane and sensible charismatics who love Scripture and generally teach sound doctrine while avoiding most of their movement's worst errors. I think they represent a fairly small minority of the worldwide charismatic community, but they do exist. A few of them are good friends—even *longtime* friends—of mine. I have friends (for example) in the Calvary Chapel movement, which is mildly charismatic in doctrine but whose worship is generally more Bible centered than even the typical non-Charismatic seeker-sensitive church. As a matter of fact, my chief concern about the Calvary Chapel movement would not even be its advocacy of charismatic views, but its increasingly aggressive campaign against Calvinism.

That's not all. I have warm affection and heartfelt respect for most of the best-known Reformed charismatic leaders, including C.J. Mahaney, Wayne Grudem, and Sam Storms. [Let's call them "Type-R charismatics."] I've greatly benefited from major aspects of their ministries, and I regularly recommend resources from them that I have found helpful. I've corresponded with the world-famous Brit-blogger Adrian Warnock for at least fifteen years now and had breakfast with him on two occasions, and I like him very much. I'm sure we agree on far more things than we disagree about. And I'm also certain the matters we agree on—starting with the meaning of the cross—are a lot more important than the issues we disagree on, which are all secondary matters.

But that is not to suggest that the things we disagree on are nonissues.

Candor, and not a lack of charity, requires me to state this conviction plainly: *The belief that extrabiblical revelation is normative does indeed “regularly and systematically breed willful gullibility, not discernment.”* Even the more sane and sober [Type-R] charismatics are not totally exempt from the tendency.

Remember that Paul Cain and the Kansas City Prophets found an amazing amount of support from Reformed charismatics on both sides of the Atlantic, even after it was clear to more objective minds that the “prophets” were regularly and systematically issuing false prophecies.

And that fact *ought* to have been clear very early. In 1989, the senior Kansas City Prophet, Bob Jones, acknowledged that he could claim an accuracy rate of no higher than two-thirds. By 1991, Jones was utterly discredited because of his own sexual misconduct with women who came to him seeking prophetic counseling.

Shortly after that (in early 1992), John MacArthur, Lance Quinn, and I met with Paul Cain and Jack Deere in John MacArthur’s office at Jack Deere’s request. Deere wanted to try to convince John MacArthur that the charismatic movement—especially the Vineyard branch—was on a trajectory to make doctrinal soundness and biblical integrity the hallmarks of Third Wave charismatic practice. He brought Cain along, ostensibly so that we could see for ourselves that Cain was a legitimate prophet with a profound gifting.

But Cain was virtually incoherent that day. Lance Quinn remarked to me immediately afterward that it seemed as if Cain had been drinking heavily. (In retrospect it seems a fair assumption that this may indeed have been the case.) Even Deere apologized for Cain’s strange behavior that day, but Deere seemed to want us to assume it was because the Spirit was upon Cain in some unusual way. They both admitted to us that Cain’s “prophecies” were wrong at least as often as they were right. When we cited that as sufficient reason not to accept *any* of their prophecies, they cited Wayne Grudem’s views on New Testament prophecy as justification for ignoring the errors of prophecies already proven false, while giving credence to still more questionable pronouncements.

That meeting was extremely eye-opening for me. Deere was unable to answer basic questions about certain practices that Lance and I had personally observed him participating in at the Anaheim Vineyard just a few weeks before. Specifically, we asked him about two “prophets” whose public words of knowledge in the morning service were flatly contradictory. (The dueling prophets were apparently using their “gifts” to air out a dispute over some decision the church’s leaders had recently made.) Deere acknowledged that the prophecies that morning were contradictory. And he could not explain why John Wimber let both prophecies stand without a word of explanation or clarification. (He seemed to shrug off our concern by speculating that perhaps even Wimber wasn’t sure which prophecy, if either, was the true one.) Again, he appealed to Grudem, perhaps the most theologically sound of all charismatics, as justification for accepting the two prophets’ gifting as legitimate anyway.

I left that meeting amazed that anyone would give credence to such “prophets.” But several of the best Reformed charismatic leaders—all citing Grudem for authority—continued to give credence to Cain, the Kansas City Prophets, and others like them for a long, long time. Some of the Reformed

Charismatics who lent Paul Cain undue credibility did not really renounce him as a prophet until about twelve years later, when his personal sins [finally came to light](#).

(And it may be stretching things to say that everyone concerned actually “renounced” Cain’s supposed prophetic gifting even then. [He has lately made something of a comeback](#). [Jack Deere’s book still touts Cain as a superprophet, and the book was recently released in Romania, where it has left a massive amount of confusion in its wake. Wayne Grudem’s endorsement of the book remains unaltered. I recently wrote him to ask if Cain’s moral failure would spur him to modify or remove his endorsement of Deere’s paean to Cain, and Grudem wrote to assure me that his endorsement of the book still stands.]])

As long as Reformed charismatics justify the practice of encouraging people to proclaim “prophecies” that are unverified and unverifiable—and which frequently prove to be wrong—I’ll stand by the concern I expressed: Even the very best of charismatics sometimes foster unwarranted and unreasonable gullibility.

And gullibility about whether God has really spoken or not is seriously dangerous.

When a false belief is truly *dangerous* and comes replete with the kind of long and dismal track record that extrabiblical revelation brings with it, it’s not “uncharitable” for those who see the danger and are truly concerned about it to sound a shrill warning rather than humming a gentle lullaby.

My charismatic friend Dr. Warnock insists that I have been uncharitable because I have stated my opinion about the dangers of charismatic doctrine without explicitly exempting him and others whom he likes from my warning against gullibility. It makes him “uncomfortable” to read such things on our blog as often as we post them (even though the vast majority of our [2007] posts on the charismatic issue were in fact made at *his* behest).

I have to say in reply that his appeal to how our posts make him *feel*, while he declines to give any rational or reasonable explanation for why he thinks our candor *must* be motivated by a lack of charity, is an echo of the very tendency that I think is so dangerous in the charismatic mindset.

I do realize some people are uncomfortable with such a firm stance against the charismatic position. *I’m equally uncomfortable with the charismatic position itself*. Let’s both remember that our respective comfort levels are not reliable gauges of our brothers’ charity (or lack thereof), and let’s try to focus on the actual issue under discussion.

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