

Strange Fire Recap: Day Three

Code: B131019

Conrad Mbewe – “Are We Preachers or Are We Witch Doctors?”

Zambian preacher and author Conrad Mbewe kicked off the third and final day of Strange Fire with a powerful introduction to life in the African church. He vividly explained that many charismatic pastors hold the same offices—and essentially function—as local village witch doctors, taking advantage of the superstitions of their people. The pastors use the peoples’ superstitions to their advantage, insulating themselves from criticism. Mbewe gave a clear call to support the spread of the true gospel in Africa, and to counter the vast damage caused by the importation of charismatic teaching.

Phil Johnson – “Providence /s Remarkable”

During the breakout sessions, Phil Johnson addressed one of the major presuppositions of the charismatic movement—the belief that unless God is regularly moving in miraculous ways in the world, He is altogether absent. He explained that the charismatic mindset sees the cessation of the gifts as nothing more than deism, and that this misconception has led to the widespread watering down of the church’s understanding of miracles. Preaching out of Matthew 10, Johnson described Christ’s commissioning of the disciples and His emphasizing God’s providence and not the gifts He had bestowed on them. By explaining the various ways God regularly intervenes in the world through His providence, Johnson made it clear that God’s engagement in this world is not dependent on His miraculous intervention.

Justin Peters – “Spiritual Shipwreck of the Word-Faith Movement”

Justin Peters’s second breakout session picked up where he left off Thursday, in his exposé of the Word-Faith movement. His apologetic approach provided a clear contrast between the words of false teachers and what the Bible plainly says. He addressed the strange manifestations and bizarre claims of many within the charismatic movement, particularly some practices that parallel behavior common to Hindu cults. He explained that tongues, prophecy, uncontrolled laughter, and slaying in the spirit are not the exclusive domain of charismatic Christianity. What’s more, he made it clear that those manifestations have no biblical foundation or defense.

Nathan Busenitz – “Charismatic Counterfeits: Do the Modern Gifts Meet the Biblical Standard?”

In his breakout session, Nathan Busenitz addressed the question of whether the modern charismatic gifts meet the biblical standard of spiritual gifts. He thoroughly defined the terms of the debate over spiritual gifts, carefully couching them in the historical context of the church. He paid specific attention to three key charismatic gifts—prophecy, tongues, and healing—and carefully walked his listeners through biblical examples of each one. In light of the clear testimony of Scripture, his conclusion was that what we see in the charismatic movement are not the same gifts described in Scripture.

Panel Q&A

For the second day in a row, Todd Friel sat down for a Q&A with several of the conference speakers. He led John MacArthur, Nathan Busenitz, Phil Johnson, and Conrad Mbewe through a discussion on the practical aspects of dealing with the charismatic church. The speakers took turns answering how best to assist people caught up in the movement, and how attendees can be effective spiritual stimulants in their congregations. As Friel played more video clips and probed deeper into the issues with thought-provoking questions, the speakers emphasized the importance of having a biblical basis for everything in the believer's life. Each man was compassionate but direct in the need to biblically confront false teaching, and offered encouragement on how to effectively engage people on these important issues.

John MacArthur – “An Appeal to My Continuationist Friends”

To close the conference Friday night, John MacArthur took the pulpit and began by answering many of the criticisms regarding Strange Fire. He directly addressed the claims that the teaching at the conference has been unloving and divisive, saying that “the most loving thing someone can do is to tell the truth” and that “it’s better to be divided by the truth than united by error.” He said he *does* care about offending people, but he cares *more* about offending God.

With that in mind, he made a clear call for his continuationist friends to abandon a position that gives license and credibility to the excesses of the charismatic movement. He strongly exhorted them to consider the cost of their continuationist stance, and how it can be a gateway to unbiblical charismatic theology and practice. He closed his time, and the week, by restating his motive to hold the Strange Fire conference. He demonstrated from 1 and 2 Timothy a pastor's responsibilities—illustrated in the life of Paul—to declare and guard the treasured truth of God's Word.

We trust Strange Fire was an encouragement to you. We hope you'll check out other media from the Strange Fire conference [here](#). We look forward to how the Lord will use those resources to strengthen His church and grow His people.

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