

The Broad Brush

Scripture: Jude 4

Code: B131028

Without question, the most common complaint I hear from my charismatic friends about the Strange Fire conference is, “*You always paint with a broad brush!*”

I hate being pedantic, but I can’t resist pointing out that such a criticism itself is a fairly sweeping overstatement. It’s true that some broad generalizations were made during the conference. Language without nuance can sometimes be useful to make one’s meaning forcefully clear (Jesus often used hyperbole for emphasis).

But it can also have the opposite effect, especially in a hotly contested family dispute. This is one of the first lessons young husbands learn—sometimes the hard way.

For that very reason, I don’t much like generalizations in a context like this. I therefore tried in my seminars to be very specific. For example, in a breakout session titled “[Is There a Baby in the Charismatic Bathwater?](#)” my main goal was to explain as precisely as possible why we don’t believe there is a safe zone in the whole universe of charismatic conviction. I also wanted to explain why we believe some of the finest and best-known Reformed non-cessationists are unwittingly providing cover for aberrant people and movements in some of the most problematic districts of the charismatic community. I quoted, named, and documented a fair number of specifics.

So far no one has played any sound bite from my seminar and complained that I personally was guilty of broad brushing. The main grievance against *me* has been precisely the opposite. I was too specific. Did I really need to criticize certain leading Reformed continuationists *by name*?

Still, I am quite happy to agree wholeheartedly with our critics about one important thing: Broad-brush arguments alone are not a sufficient answer to the problem *Strange Fire* attempts to address. But I also want to challenge fair-minded people to look further than the sound bites you hear critics of the conference repeatedly citing. There certainly was more substance to the conference than a few cherry-picked sound bites. Once again, those who say *all* the arguments set forth in the conference were applied with an industrial-size roller are themselves making an unfair generalization.

Let me add this: It took a spectacular lack of self-awareness, blended with a stunning ignorance of the actual concerns we are raising (or a prodigious dose ofchutzpah), for Michael Brown to coax from Sam Storms an [effusive endorsement of Mike Bickle](#), just minutes after Brown played sound bites from *other* Strange Fire speakers and scolded *me* with the you-shouldn’t-lump-us-all-together stanza of the broad-brush complaint. Dr. Storms boldly and emphatically held Bickle up as a spiritual model to follow, suggesting that Bickle is John Piper’s equal in piety and gospel clarity.

There’s your answer, in case you are still wondering why some of the speakers at Strange Fire refused to pause and draw a hard-line distinction every single time they mentioned Reformed continuationists. Why don’t we automatically exempt our Reformed charismatic brethren from all the

criticisms we aim at the lunatic mainstream in Third Wave, word-faith, drunken-glory, and holy-laughter fraternities? Why don't we portray mild continuationism as a perfectly safe middle road? Why don't we just shut up and let our charismatic brothers and sisters who are Reformed or conservative evangelicals follow after whatever miracle-claims and charismatic prophecies they like?

Well, let's review:

Sam Storms is one of the most frequently cited names whenever anyone lists the soundest theologians in the continuationist camp. Dr. Storms is a Calvinist in the tradition of S. Lewis Johnson. He's a gracious, likable, kindhearted, and usually well-spoken man who is supposed to be living proof that someone can be Reformed, charismatic, and biblically responsible all at once.

Mike Bickle is the founder of Kansas City's International House of Prayer (IHOP). Bickle is also the guy who [admits with a grin](#) that 80 percent of the phenomena in the thousands of charismatic meetings he has sponsored and participated in have been utterly false—phony, fraudulent, fleshly—totally and completely fake. Bickle insists that's not a problem. He is willing to “allow the false for the sake of the real.”

Bickle and Storms worked together as mentors to the Kansas City Prophets during the prophets' rise to fame and fall into moral disgrace. The leading figures associated with that movement (and by most accounts the most gifted of the bunch) were **Bob Jones** and **Paul Cain**. Both of them suffered scandalous moral failures. Neither Bickle nor Storms (nor any of the self-styled prophets) saw it coming.

Another leading figure in the prophecy movement of those days was **Rick Joyner**, head of MorningStar ministries (home of the “[Holy Ghost Hokey Pokey](#)” and other worse nonsense). Joyner is frequently seen these days with **Michael Brown** discussing various topics ranging from politics to Pentecostal phenomena. Dr. Brown has given every indication that he is a close pal of Joyner's.

Joyner [personally engineered](#) the public restoration and return to ministry of **Todd Bentley**, the adulterous, biker-booted heretic who (in terms of fame and influence) is arguably the single most hideous corruption of “ministry” the charismatic movement has yet produced. Bentley is a living blasphemy and a walking reproach.

In other words, the Todd Bentley madness and the worst abuses of charismatic prophecy are much more closely connected to Michael Brown's circle of fellowship than Brown and Storms want to admit. There's really only one degree of separation between Michael Brown and Todd Bentley.

So Sam Storms gives fulsome praise to Mike Bickle; Michael Brown collaborates with Rick Joyner. They are like Aaron and Hur—holding up the arms of these prophets who freely admit to prophesying falsely. Meanwhile Bickle spreads havoc among naïve charismatics with phony phenomena and false prophecies. And Joyner aggressively promotes a wanton spiritual menace.

But note well where Brown and Storms aim *their* criticism. They both doggedly insist that the nuttiness of popular charismania is overblown by critics like me.

Dr. Brown says he is totally unaware of some of the most egregiously false prophecies and bizarre

shenanigans we have specifically pointed out to him—even though these things are happening right under his nose. Yet he wants the critics (and me in particular) to trust him when he says he is confident that the charismatic movement worldwide consists mainly of people with sound faith and sober minds who are godly, biblically literate, informed believers. Sure, he'll admit that there are occasional “extremes and imbalances”—but Dr. Brown refuses to say that the prosperity gospel is a damnable *false* gospel, or that it's dangerous to follow the lead of unhinged charismatics like Bickle and Joyner.

Frankly, I don't own a brush broad enough to paint that mess. Is it reasonable to believe that the best and brightest charismatics are seriously concerned about what's *biblical*—while these men give Mike Bickle and the modern prophecy movement a ringing public endorsement and balk at acknowledging that the charismatic movement is beset with very serious problems?

Are they even capable of recognizing “extremes and imbalances” when they see them? Remember, Dr. Storms worked with, and affirmed the supposed gifting of, the charismatic movement's most famous prophets for years, and apparently none of them had enough genuine discernment to realize that their main prophetic guru (Paul Cain) was a drunkard, a homosexual, and a fraud. When it comes to discerning charismatic claims and distinguishing truth from make-believe, Dr. Storms is [frighteningly naïve](#).

During the Brownsville Revival (a fiasco which Michael Brown insists was a mighty work of God, even though the host church was left as spiritually and financially desolate as Detroit), Dr. Brown was so adept at causing people to be “slain in the Spirit” that his nickname was “[Knock 'em Down Brown](#).”

These men have indeed seen *and participated in* the dark side of the charismatic movement. Perhaps readers will understand why I'm skeptical of their cheery optimism about the overall state of the movement.

The false doctrines and bad practices that dominate charismatic television are *not* confined to one corrupt branch on an otherwise good tree. In reality, both historically and by direct line of descent, the whole movement stems from a rotten root. Error and delusion are the phloem and xylem of its central belief system.

I don't mean that as hyperbole. That's the point we are trying to make.

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