

False Apostles and the Case of Todd Bentley

Scripture: Matthew 12:43–45

Code: B131120

The self-professing modern apostles of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) would have you believe they have the most direct line of communication with God. But their faulty track record—even on matters of simple biblical discernment—gives you good reason to wonder if they're perpetually dialing the wrong number.

Perhaps the most vivid example of the NAR's frightening lack of discernment was their handling of notorious heretic Todd Bentley. Instead of warning people about the danger Bentley presented, the apostolic elite decided to affirm and anoint him as one of their own. Far from identifying the good reasons for caution and concern about his teaching, the leading modern apostles went out of their way to place their stamp of approval on this obvious charlatan.

Bentley, a Canadian evangelist, rose to worldwide prominence in 2008 during a series of "revival" meetings in Lakeland, Florida. Originally scheduled to speak for just a few days, Bentley wound up staying for several months, claiming that a new outpouring of the Spirit was taking place. The meetings were full of bizarre healings and manifestations—not the least of which was Bentley's penchant for kicking and punching sick people who requested prayer. Bentley seemed to go out of his way to cultivate a hard, tough-guy persona.

The Lakeland revival generated a large amount of Christian-media attention and attracted enormous crowds from all over the world. The claims of miracles coming out of Lakeland were staggering—by the end of the revival, dozens of people had supposedly been raised from the dead. Those outrageous claims, coupled with Bentley's outlandish character, continued to generate greater and greater publicity. One major global satellite channel—GOD TV—reorganized its programming schedule to broadcast live video from the Lakeland revival. For a brief period, it seemed Todd Bentley might become the new face of the charismatic movement in the twenty-first century.

However, the actual content of Bentley's teaching raised more than a few red flags. In fact, the theological problems were so vast they were hard to ignore. And yet a lot of people managed to do just that.

Here are a few of the more obvious examples of the unmistakable heresy Bentley promoted.

1) Bentley frequently told hyperviolent stories about his own manifestations of the Spirit. Smashed tables and doors were common results of his charismatic experiences. One particularly violent episode occurred soon after his conversion. In a testimony you can listen to [here](#), he claims that after he was saved, it was revealed that he was also possessed by demons—twenty-five to be exact.

The biblical contradiction of a true Christian simultaneously inhabited by the Holy Spirit and demonic spirits (compare Matthew 12:43-45 with 2 Corinthians 6:15-16; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Ephesians 1:13) seemed to escape the notice of Bentley and the undiscerning apostles of the NAR. Whether true or

not, Bentley's testimony was a tacit revelation of his true spiritual condition, one that was totally lost on the modern-day apostles.

2) Bentley also [told his followers](#) that God had instructed him not to preach about Jesus, but instead to stress the supernatural. Here's the story in his own words:

You know, I told the Lord, "Why can't I just move in healing and forget talking about all that other stuff?" He said, "Because, Todd, you gotta get the people to believe in the angel." I said, "God, why do I want people to believe in the angel, isn't it about getting the people to believe in Jesus?" He said, "The people already believe in Jesus, but the church doesn't believe in the supernatural." The church has no problem believing in Jesus. But what we don't believe in is the supernatural.

According to Todd Bentley, God didn't want more preaching about salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It's impossible to imagine the apostle Paul, or any true apostle, affirming someone like Todd Bentley. Paul refused to speak about his supernatural experiences (2 Corinthians 12:2-6) and made Christ the singular focus of his ministry (1 Corinthians 2:2). Clearly, that was not the commitment at Lakeland. Instead, whoever was communicating with Bentley wanted him to tell more stories about angelic visitations and kicking people to cure their cancer.

3) In fact, there was almost no preaching of the Word of God during the Lakeland revival. Bentley's sermons were dominated by outlandish anecdotes that centered on Bentley and his charismatic exploits. In [this video](#), Bentley reads an email account of a person in a nearby community who was supposedly raised from the dead. According to the email, the person woke up "praising God and the Reverend Todd Bentley." The email goes on to claim that while he (the dead person) was in heaven, he heard "our beloved Reverend Todd and his voice pulling his spirit out of heaven." That's the most honest appraisal of Bentley's preaching—it turns people away from heaven.

4) It was not unusual for Bentley to share in the credit for the miracles claimed during the Lakeland revival. However, there was not a single documented miracle from the Lakeland revival. The conservative Christian publication *World* magazine asked Bentley's ministry team for a list of names of those who had been healed. After a long wait and much persistence, *World* eventually received a list of twelve names, and subsequently found that many of those people had died from the ailments they were supposedly cured of. A further investigation by ABC *Nightline* reported that "not a single [medical] miracle could be verified."

In spite of those and countless other warning signs, the Lakeland revival was widely celebrated as a legitimate movement of the Holy Spirit. Even cautious charismatics and continuationists took a "wait and see" approach to Bentley and his antics. Prominent Reformed charismatic Adrian Warnock invoked Acts 5:33-39 when [he wrote](#) of Bentley, "I am taking the Gamaliel approach, at least for now." That kind of sinful attitude—one which encourages Christians *not* to exercise biblical discernment—permeates evangelicalism and saturates the charismatic movement.

Peter Wagner and his fellow apostles of the NAR did not follow Warnock's advice to take a "wait and see" approach. They gathered to celebrate and affirm Bentley's ministry and confirm him as a fellow apostle. Within days of his confirmation, Bentley's ministry would collapse in a massive moral scandal.

Setting aside the sad and obvious irony—that these so-called apostles lacked the spiritual insight to

discern Bentley's true character—the scandal should have embarrassed the entire charismatic movement. However, the continued lack of serious theological self-examination since Bentley's failure only proves the scandal was little more than a speed bump.

Next time we'll look at the NAR's prophetic affirmations of Bentley—words they supposedly received from God—and compare them to the wicked realities that were exposed just days later. And we'll see that there is good reason to question not only the discernment abilities of these modern apostles, but even their basic grip on reality.

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