

Discernment and Disaster

Scripture: Galatians 1:8–9; Ephesians 5:11

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On June 23, 2008, C. Peter Wagner and sixteen other high-profile charismatics—including many of the big guns of the modern apostolic movement—gathered in Lakeland, Florida, to affirm the Lord's blessing on the ministry of Todd Bentley, and to commission him as a fellow apostle. Just days later, the wheels would begin to fall off Bentley's ministry, and the ensuing scandal would expose both his unrepentant immorality and a shocking lack of discernment on the part of several key charismatic leaders.

The whole Bentley fiasco would be laughable if it weren't so tragic and blasphemous. We've [previously discussed](#) some of the bizarre claims he made during the Lakeland revival. Even the most casual observers had plenty of reasons for concern about Bentley's teaching and practice.

How those red flags failed to catch the attention of the New Apostolic Reformation remains a mystery. What is clear is that Wagner and his modern apostles failed to warn God's people about Bentley's heresy (Galatians 1:8-9; Ephesians 5:11), and instead were eager to affirm and bless his ministry as a true work of God.

Here are just some of the highlights from Bentley's "apostolic alignment," which you can watch in full online: [part one](#), [part two](#), [part three](#), and [part four](#).

- Peter Wagner is the first speaker during Bentley's commissioning. He asks three of the other assembled apostles—Bill Johnson (pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, California), Che Ahn (pastor of HRock Church in Pasadena, California), and John Arnott (founding pastor of the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, home of the notorious Toronto Blessing)—if they "perceive the grace of God given to Todd Bentley as an evangelist to lead the Lakeland outpouring?" Each affirms that they do.
- Wagner then affirms Bentley through a prophecy regarding the blessings that he claimed the Lord was about to pour out on Bentley's ministry. His exact words: "I take the apostolic authority God has given me, and I decree to Todd Bentley: Your power will increase. Your authority will increase. Your favor will increase. Your influence will increase. Your revelation will increase. I also decree that a new, supernatural strength will flow through this ministry. A new life force will penetrate this move of God. Government will be established to set things in their proper order. God will pour out a higher level of discernment to distinguish truth from error. New relationships will surface to open the gates for the future."
- Wagner then turns the mic over to Che Ahn, who continues to bless Bentley's ministry. He says, "Recognizing that God has chosen you and appointed you to bear much and lasting fruit at this Lakeland revival and revival around the world; recognizing that He has called you as an Ephesians 4 evangelist and a revivalist moving in signs and wonders, knowing that you have walked in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing Jesus in every way, bearing fruit in every good

work, and growing in the intimacy and knowledge of God; we, as your brothers and your friends who have a deep love for you, Shauna, and your whole family, we just esteem you. We are here to stand with you and support you, and we are here to commission you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in the power of Jesus' name, with special oil from Chuck Pierce." Pierce is another apostle who could not be on hand for the event, but sent his blessing in the form of some "revival oil."

-Ahn then anoints Bentley with oil, knocking him to the ground. Bentley would spend the remainder of the ceremony lying on the platform, "soaking" in the power of the Spirit as Johnson, Arnott, and several of the other apostles delivered prophecies about Bentley's greatness and his important role in God's plans to pour out His glory in the church.

Of course, that's not what happened. Not long after his commissioning, Bentley was exposed as an adulterer, a liar, and an occasional drunk. The [facts](#) of Bentley's sin are matters of public record, and the point here is not to revisit the gory details of his immorality. Instead, the point is that the modern apostles—who claim to hear from and speak on behalf of God—could not have been more wrong about Bentley, his spiritual condition, or where his ministry was headed. It's not clear where their prophecies of blessing came from—but they clearly *did not* come from God.

The fallout from Bentley's moral failure has been telling. Peter Wagner wrote a lengthy and fascinating [explanation](#) of his involvement with Bentley. In his version of events, he went to Lakeland not for Bentley, but for the sake of God's people—to "bring order to the chaos and confusion sweeping through the Body of Christ worldwide because of the television."

Wagner confesses that he didn't know Bentley prior to his commissioning, and claims that the apostolic alignment was his attempt to bring Bentley under the authority of other apostles. But compare that with Wagner's words of unequivocal praise and blessing during the alignment ceremony. In fact, apostle after apostle proclaimed nothing but blessing and favor for Bentley. If they truly were speaking on behalf of God—the same God who was about to reveal Bentley's immorality—how did they all manage to get the message so wrong?

Worse still, it seems Wagner had heard rumors of corruption and ungodly activity at Lakeland. But he says he ignored advice from others to address those issues privately before the alignment, a choice he defends by saying, "I had to follow God's leading for me personally." In effect, then, his explanation of the whole debacle is, *If you don't like the way I handled it, blame God.*

That kind of blame shifting has gone on since sin first entered the world (Genesis 3:12), and it still doesn't hold any water. The fact is, Wagner and his fellow apostles usurped authority that doesn't belong to them. And that for people who supposedly speak for God, they show an alarming lack of biblical discernment and understanding.

And some of them have yet to learn the folly of their ways. Rick Joyner is the head of MorningStar ministries and was one of the apostles who spoke during Todd Bentley's commissioning ceremony. He's also the man who ushered Bentley back into ministry, [writing](#) in 2010:

I felt that it was time to release Todd into limited ministry in our church because I had the leading of the Lord to do this. To me, this always trumps every other reason, but I had some other reasons, too.

In just a few lines, Rick Joyner summarizes everything that's wrong with the modern apostolic movement. Personal intuition is not the same as direct revelation, and it cannot be allowed to trump biblical truth. And if a shipwreck like the Todd Bentley fiasco isn't enough to alert everyone in the charismatic movement to the need for careful, biblical discernment, it's frightening to think what it *will* take.

As for the modern apostles, their track record is unimpressive to say the least. Fallible prophecy, inaccurate spiritual impressions, and dangerously poor discernment were not characteristic of the New Testament apostles, and neither should they be hallmarks of church leaders today. In fact, the greatest argument against the modern continuation of the apostolic gifts and the office of the apostle might be the modern apostles *themselves*.

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