

## Strange Fire Conference:

### MacArthur's Appeal to His Continuationist Friends

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The Strange Fire conference closed with a final address from John MacArthur. In this address he responds to seven accusations brought against the conference, follows with eight appeals to his continuationist friends, and concludes by walking through 1 and 2 Timothy, highlighting the need to stand firm in guarding divine revelation against false doctrine.



Before addressing the accusations against the conference, MacArthur charged attendees to carefully read their copy of *Strange Fire* and to measure it against the Word of God.

He is convinced that this book, with its well-documented research and extensive footnotes, will withstand careful scrutiny. He reminds us that this book and conference is intended for the Church. He has no expectation for either one to be helpful to non-believers, which he suspects makes up much of the charismatic movement.

MacArthur then shared from his heart responses to seven accusations against the conference. These accusations have arisen from the Internet. It is interesting to note that we live in a time where we are able to give more people access to information simultaneously like never before, which then puts us quickly under scrutiny as never before.

### SEVEN ACCUSATIONS

Here are the seven accusations, along with brief responses.

1. **They are accused of being unloving.** MacArthur responds that the most loving thing for someone to do is to tell the truth. That is how love acts. It would be unloving to leave people in darkness and error. Paul spoke in Acts how he was moved to tears knowing that perverse men would lead people astray. Titus 1:4 directs pastors to fulfill their duty to point out error and give biblical arguments against false teaching. This is how to care for the sheep and protect them.

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2. **They are accused of being divisive.** MacArthur agrees. Truth is divisive by nature. Jesus came to bring a sword. Truth, by its very nature, is separated by error. It is more important to be divided by truth than united by error.
3. **This issue is not clear in the Bible.** Candidly, MacArthur responds that if the issue is unclear as some claim, it is unclear under the influence of false teachers. This issue was clear to the Apostles, early Church Fathers, Reformers, and Puritans. It was clearly delineated by the creeds and confessions. More modern heroes of the faith such as Warfield, Spurgeon, Boice, Sproul and others have taken their stand. Is it now unclear because of Swaggart, Baker, and Copeland? The true historic stream of sound doctrine has made this issue clear.
4. **This issue is only true of the extreme lunatic fringe side of the movement.** MacArthur believes that this statement is patently untrue. There is error in this movement all the way through it. 90% of the movement believe in the prosperity gospel. 24 to 25 million of these people deny the Trinity. 100 million in the movement are Roman Catholic. This is not characteristic of the fringe. This is the movement and it grows at a rapid rate.
5. **They are attacking a movement that has given us rich music.** MacArthur disagrees with this opinion. He is convinced that the contemporary style of music in the charismatic movement is the entry point of false doctrine into our churches. A church rooted in historical doctrine and hymns will be reluctant to embrace this music. This movement has diminished music by taking it out of the area of the mind and reduces it to feelings of the flesh.
6. **They are attacking brothers.** MacArthur wishes he could affirm this. From his vantage point, this is a movement made up largely of non-Christians that lacks accountability. No one polices this movement. Every faithfully reformed elder, pastor, scholar and teacher of the word should bear the responsibility of policing this movement. People accuse MacArthur of being fixated on this issue, yet in 45 years of ministry he has only held one 3-day conference on this matter. Rather he has devoted his time to preaching the New Testament verse by verse and exalting Christ.
7. **Finally, MacArthur does not care about offending people.** He admits that he holds the truth with kindness and love. He does care about peoples' feelings. He does care about offending them. Just not nearly as much as he cares about not offending God.

MacArthur remarks that this is an alien movement springing forth from the 60's hippie drug culture. It is seeker friendly and culturally driven. The heroes of the charismatic movement are fundamentally different than ours. If you are a cessationist, then you have

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a responsibility to police this movement. Therefore, he wrote an open letter to his continuationist friends to re-examine their position. These are real friends of his—people he respects, has ministered alongside, prayed with, and hammered out convictions with. They are doctrinally conservative pastors and scholars that call themselves *continuationists* because they want to give place to this movement.

## EIGHT STATEMENTS

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MacArthur provides 8 statements to why they must help us.

1. **Continuationists give legitimacy to the contemporary charismatic movement.** When theologically conservative men give credibility to this movement the whole movement gains credibility. Young restless, and reformed embrace the theology of their heroes and in turn become open to this movement perpetuating its momentum.
2. **Continuationists degrade the miraculous nature of true gifts given by God to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Church.** God gave special revelatory gifts, signs and miracles to validate His revelation. Hebrews 2:3 expounds on this. This text becomes meaningless if these gifts are given to everyone today. It is no longer a sign of anything anymore. This diminishes the beauty of the original gifts. Highjacking New Testament terminology degrades what was once genuinely miraculous.
3. **Continuationists severely limit how people can be responsive to charismatic confusion.** MacArthur has heard from friends some of the most bizarre stories that should assuredly be denounced. However, those individuals have given up the high ground and cannot speak against these stories because they have bought into continuationism.
4. **Continuationists who insist that God gives special revelation today gives way to people being led by confusion and error.** They have altered every aspect of these gifts. None of the gifts supposedly at work today, work in the way they did in the first century. Tongues are no longer languages. Prophecy could be wrong. These modifications remove the authority and legitimate standard set as the criteria for what is accurate. These new forms of special revelation such as words of prophecy are theological train wrecks. When you go beyond the Word of God you cannot contain the error.
5. **Continuationists tacitly deny the reformed tenet of Sola Scriptura.** People who would not normally deny the closing of the canon, Scripture's authority or sufficiency, do so by defaulting towards a belief in extra-revelation. This extra-revelation is widely abused by people in power.

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6. **Continuationists open the door to speaking in tongues which is the mindless ecstasy of the charismatic expression.** Its not a language but is gibberish. These people are not really continuationists. They are a different form of cessationists because by their own admission the gifts do not operate the same as they did in the first century.
7. **Continuationists assert the gift of healing and in turn affirm the fraudulent ministry of healers.** Who would want to do that? These people are the lowest of the low. They prey on the ill, destitute, and poorest people and tell them lies in order to get rich. Who would want to do anything to aid and abet them?
8. **Continuationists distract from the Holy Spirit's true ministry by enticing people to buy into a false ministry.** What deficiency are they compensating for? Are not the Holy Spirit's many works of regeneration, conviction, filling, sealing and more sufficient? You entice people to counterfeits rather than the heartfelt gratitude and full measure that the Spirit offers. This creates two stumbling blocks to sanctification. People do not think they have all that they need and, therefore, they have to chase after that which they cannot actually have.

MacArthur argues that the charismatic movement and the position of continuationism opens the door to more theological error than any other doctrinal aberration which has preceded it. The true church needs to respond. These errors must be corrected. Don't call yourself a charismatic Calvinist. Calvin rejected that himself. If you insist on staying in that movement then drop the label of Calvinism. If these theologically conservative continuationists take a turn to cessationism they may make a massive difference for the next generation.

## GUARDING DIVINE REVELATION

MacArthur closed the conference by walking through 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy. He emphasized the importance of Timothy guarding divine revelation and protecting it from empty chatter and false teaching. In 2 Timothy this is a matter of great concern for Paul. He worries that Timothy wavers on the edge of cowardice. So again and again Paul exhorts Timothy to be strong, take a stand and fight the good fight. We are encouraged by a brief word in Hebrews 13:23 where we discover that Timothy has been released from prison. Apparently Paul's parting words gripped his heart. He mustered courage, spoke the Word boldly, guarded it from false teaching, and went to prison for his conviction. Paul's letter changed the course of Timothy's life.

Paul stood alone towards the end with few friends: Onesimus, Luke, and Mark counted as them. Yet he confidently was able to bestow the ministry of the gospel upon Timothy.

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MacArthur is thankful that wonderful people surround him. He cannot say that he has been forsaken quite like Paul, though he has been vilified as will anyone who stands firm on issues like this.

May we guard the treasure, retain sound words, study to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word, and preaching that Word. And if no one stands with us: so be it. The Lord will strengthen us.

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