

Jack Deere has written this book in part chronicling his very personal transition from a belief that the miraculous works of Jesus and the Apostles did not extend to anyone beyond the close of the canon. Once a stark critic, Deere represented a limb of the body of Christ that would not accept the validity of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement, and called those who did abusive and ignorant of God and Scripture. His background, theological education, church, and work environment all affirmed his beliefs. When they started to unravel, he was able to see the holes in his arguments and of those who thought as he did, as having no correct exegetical basis.

One of the main points is this: “we often tow our brains around behind us to justify what we already believe” (Deere 1993, 35). Rather than seek truth, Deere asserts, we seek what affirms what we *believe* as truth and in turn, hold it up and maintain our world views by it. But in fact it is their unbelief that fuels their belief, and Deere makes the argument that it is one big reason that they have not witnessed God’s power this way.

Another point brought up in the book is that while it is wrong to assume all claims of experiencing God’s power is false, there are incidences that show some abuses or misleading people is occurring. Even so, “miracles neither confirm nor support the distinctive doctrines or practices of individual churches or Christian groups” (Deere 1993, 70)

A third significant point which anchors this book, is that there is no formula, right words, or amount of personal piety that can bring about an act of the Holy Spirit. It is God’s work in His sovereignty and He acts out of love for us, despite our unworthiness. “We are only healed because of the goodness of the Son of God expressed in his sacrifice for us” (Deere 1993, 156). This is the point I agree with most in the book.

In terms of my ministry context, the perspective of this author is foreign, however. I grew up in a Pentecostal church, and have attended churches that all professed the power of the Holy Spirit preached Him as the full third person of the God-head, dwelling in us and working throughout us in unimaginable, yet visible ways. There is only one exception to those many churches that nourished me, one of them expressed openly that the canon and its miracles, including theophany, had ceased. Ironically, one Sunday morning it was there that God chose to unstop my ears, I heard Him audibly, and got baptized in water moments later (as is their custom in the manner of Philip and the eunuch from Ethiopia).

I got the distinct feeling throughout this piece that I was not the authors' intended reader. Deere did not just present his views past and present, but painted himself and transition into the center of the room. While he did present the strengths of his background churches and seminaries, though not omitting their wrongs; listed a number of abuses he has known of in charismatic churches; presented churches experiencing the same transition with God as he was, and even the individuals he witnessed that God used to transform the lives of others in a supernatural way; but he did not, in any substantial way, include churches that have always been charismatic into the discussion—what those congregations/denominations have done right and what can be learned from uniting not just associating with them. With this, I disagree most.

Moving forward, however, I have a much better understanding of fundamentalist Christians who are cultish and/or bigots, as J.I. Packer described them on page 74. I see better a worldview created to insulate them against prioritizing their personal morality along with the cause of upholding their views of doctrine. I believe, at least on my part, I can bring my bewilderment and dismissive attitude to a close and be open to dialogue better armed with vital facts, and I am grateful for an avenue through which I can find the conviction to be more loving.

