

Prophetic Integrity: Aligning Our Words with God’s Word by R. T. Kendall. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2022. xxvi + 174 pp., paper, \$18.99.

Since pastors speak for God, ministry must be informed by theology and so, R. T. Kendall asserted, “This book is about God and his attributes—whether God is all-powerful, all-knowing of the future, and sovereign. . . . And my aim is to honor the God of the Bible and to show he does not change (Mal. 3:6)” (p. xix). Kendall (DPhil, Oxford University) was pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, England for twenty-five years. He is author of more than 60 books, including *Total Forgiveness* (Charisma House, 2007). Kendall is widely read and respected, still the unfamiliar may not know that he is a Reformed charismatic holding to the doctrines of grace, as well as the gifts of the Spirit (prophecy, healing, miracles, and speaking in tongues).

The motivations for the book are the: (1) gross misjudgment of many charismatic Christians concerning the unfulfilled prediction of Donald Trump to a second term; and the (2) sex scandal regarding the late apologist Ravi Zacharias (p. xxi). There are ten chapters but two are noteworthy. Chapter four (“The God of Glory”) builds on the premise that the Bible is theocentric, and too much theology issuing from the pulpit today is man-centered (p. 48). Kendall provided a thought-provoking discussion in chapter nine (“Is God Judging the Church Today?”) as he cited two deficiencies within the charismatic movement: (1) lack of a theology of suffering; and, (2) lack of a theology of divine judgment upon Christians (p. 141).

There are a few positives worth noting. First, his concern for orthodoxy. While one may question some of Kendall’s outcomes, none should question his intent, for his desire is scriptural faithfulness. He believes the Creator God revealed in Scripture is inherently trustworthy and reliable (p. 70), and unequivocally, “The more you honor God’s Word, the more he will honor you (1 Sam. 2:30)” (p. 111). Second, his concern for orthopraxy, specifically, having integrity; this importance is heightened especially for those who are called to ministry (p. 30). He stated sagaciously that God allowed Ravi Zacharias’ sinful exposure as a warning to us that “your sin will find you out (Num 32:23)” (p. 30). Third, his concern for the name of the Lord: “When a prophet claims to speak with the voice of *Yahweh*, the God of the whole earth, God’s name is at stake” (p. xxii).

To those who have heard Kendall speak, his *ethos* is unquestioned, but in this volume his *logos* is problematic and exposes several concerns. First, Kendall’s distinction of *the prophetic* is ill-defined. Leaning on his mentor Martyn Lloyd-Jones, he surmised, “The Bible was not given to

replace the revelatory gift of prophecy but to correct abuses . . . prophecy was direct communication from God that may refer to the past, present, or future, and that testing such communication was part of the ministry” (p. 3). Kendall does not view this kind of prophecy as revelatory Scripture; he would agree with Wayne Grudem that prophecy today is “speaking merely human words to report something God brings to mind.” Oddly, he made so much of this *prophetic foretelling* that one could easily be confused. He asked, “Would not a true prophet have foreseen a Joe Biden presidency” (pp. 67- 68)? Yes perhaps, if any such prophets existed. Considering the New Testament sense of prophet (Rom 12), one might ask *said* prophet, “Why predict a presidency, why not simply proclaim the Word?” Although he calls cessationism utter speculation and a categorical quenching of the Spirit (p. 105), it is plausible that most cessationists and some non-cessationists would disagree with his definition of *prophecy/prophet*.

Second, chapters one (“My Encounter with the Prophetic”) and two (“The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly”) are puzzling, especially in relation to Paul Cain of Kansas City Prophets fame. Kendall raves with regard to Cain’s visions, prophecies, knowledge of names, and a predicted revival in London (which did not occur). He acknowledged Cain’s theological deficiencies believing that Cain needed his theology, but Kendall needed his power (p. 8), even though Cain admitted, “his theology was about one inch deep” (p. 12). Though Kendall voiced concern about Cain and his theology (or lack thereof), amazingly he avowed, “Paul’s prophetic gift was so powerful that he could be mistaken for Elijah or Elisha” (p. 9). While Kendall’s comparison is generous, it is nonetheless unconvincing. In spite of Cain’s many failures and foibles, and despite it being contextually linked to Israel, Kendall used Romans 11:29 (“for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”) and 1 Samuel 19:23-24 (Saul prophesying as he murderously pursued David) to validate his prophetic claim. He blindly contended that Cain’s gifting and prophetic accuracy was unparalleled (p. 29). Apparently, per Kendall, Cain’s *giftings* were pre-salvific. “When I explained the gospel to Paul Cain, I got the feeling he was hearing it for the first time. To his credit, he grabbed it quickly—Paul Cain was saved when I shared the gospel with him. But it was odd that someone so gifted had such a poor understanding of the gospel” (p. 98). To make things worse, amid his notoriety, Kendall revealed that Cain was secretly a practicing homosexual (p. 29).

Third, chapter seven (“Seven Levels of Prophecy”) stretches *prophecy* in the Bible to the point of incredulity: (1) Holy Scripture; (2) noncanonical prophecy; (3) testify under persecution; (4) prophetic preaching; (5) prophetic warnings; (6) word of knowledge; and, (7)

general exhortation. Fourth, Kendall made statements that undercut his own integrity; he obliquely predicted another great awakening with accompanying visual miracles and great preaching, (pp. 34, 162), as well as sensing a new movement of the Spirit resulting in millions of Muslim conversions (p. 42). There is a generous sprinkling of odd terms: a very high level of anointing (p. 102) or even, oath-level assurance. Lastly, Kendall insisted on Hebrews 13:8 (“Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today, and forever”) as validation for his views (pp. 44, 106, 142, 147). Whereas the Spirit is immutable as well (especially in reference to essence), that is not to say that God always works the same way, in time, all the time. Yes, God can still do the miraculous, but the message of God needs no further validation, only proclamation.

Kendall is commendable in his call for integrity. However, his mishandling of key texts, his approach to spiritual gifts – in particular his definition and theological understanding of the gift of *prophecy* – give pause for commendation *in toto*. He expressed what he hoped to achieve.

First, I hope to succeed in getting charismatics generally and prophetic people particularly to accept needed correction. Second, I hope to succeed in causing evangelicals not only to regard charismatics with less prejudice but be willing to ask God to make them more open to the “immediate and direct” witness of the Holy Spirit [p. xxiii].

If his first hope includes preachers who ought to be men of integrity, his mission is accomplished; since his definition of *prophetic people* differs from non-charismatics, his mission fails because of a faulty premise. His second hope categorically fails since God will not make a person more *open* to what He has not ordained, and most who do not espouse Kendall’s view are likely comfortable with their witness of the Spirit. For a sounder work on integrity, see, *The Power of Integrity: Building a Life Without Compromise* by John MacArthur (Crossway, 1997), or the newer *Gospel People: A Call for Evangelical Integrity* (Crossway, 2022) by Michael Reeves.

Tony A. Rogers
Southside Baptist Church (Bowie, TX)

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