

J. Lee Grady: Whatever Happened to Discernment?

A few days ago I listened to Mike Winger's lengthy video about Shawn Bolz. I know all of us were horrified by the obvious abuses that have been overlooked in the prophetic movement. I hope this time we learn our lesson, but honestly I'm skeptical. I've seen this tragic scenario played out too many times in the past.

I've been identified with the charismatic renewal movement since the 1970s when I had a profound experience with the Holy Spirit at age 18. I became a Christian journalist, and I ended up working for Charisma magazine for 18 years, from 1992 to 2010. I was the editor of the magazine for 11 of those years, and then I went into fulltime missionary work in 2010.

During my tenure at Charisma I saw the good, the bad and the ugly. It was a joy to report on revivals, church growth, missionary breakthroughs and genuine miracles—and that is what kept me encouraged. But there wasn't a week that went by that we weren't investigating and reporting on the tragic failures of ministers.

I know ministry scandals happen in every segment of the church, yet I always wondered why it seemed that those of us in the "Spirit-filled" segment of the church are so prone to deception, fraud and misconduct of the worse kind.

In Mike Winger's video, he criticizes charismatic leaders because they haven't demanded accountability from fraudulent ministries. Actually, during my days at Charisma, we did speak out strongly against the financial, sexual and spiritual abuse that was prevalent in so many charismatic ministries. And yet people still defended them.

I personally wrote articles about Jim Bakker (after he

defrauded donors and went to jail); Eddie Long (who abused young men in his church), Earl Paulk (who created a sickening culture of sexual abuse in his Atlanta megachurch), Todd Bentley (who made false claims, promoted weird theology and then left his wife for another woman), evangelist W. V. Grant (who used hidden microphones to fake words of knowledge), and megachurch pastor Robert Tilton (who used fraudulent schemes to raise funds).



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I could go on and on. The list is so much longer than this.

In light of the claims against Shawn Bolz, I wanted to bring out some additional background about Paul Cain, who was considered a powerful prophet in the 1980s. I met him during those years, and I was aware that there were some serious accusations circulating about him from the earliest days. In 1989 I attended a Christian campus-ministry conference in Fort Worth, Texas, where Cain was a featured speaker.

During that meeting he gave several "words of knowledge" from the platform to eight or nine individuals. All but one of these people were leaders in the ministry that was hosting the event. In each case, Cain gave a number, and then he shared a vague personal prophecy to the people. In every case the number was a street address – and the audience was wowed that he supposedly knew this number by divine revelation. However, in one case the address he gave was actually the person's previous address. Because I worked for the ministry and I was familiar with addresses from our ministry phone list, I realized that Cain had looked at the phone list to manipulate these "prophecies." Sound familiar?

This was 1989, long before the internet or social media. But Cain was doing the same thing Bolz did, allegedly. He was "data mining," as Mike Winger terms it, to appear to be a

powerful prophet. (Cain apparently was offered a copy of the phone list to pray over it.) Many people fell for his tricks.

In 1993 I arranged a phone call with Paul Cain, and I asked Mike Bickle to be on that call because I knew Cain would want him there. During that conversation, I asked Cain if he did indeed use street numbers from the phone list. He denied it. He also told me that the reason the prophecies didn't come true was because he was depressed after his mother's death. I documented all of this in my 2010 book, *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale (Chosen)*, which mentions numerous other scandals in the charismatic movement.

I'm sharing this partly to confirm Mike Winger's findings, but also to tell you that there were people way back in those early days who did in fact speak out publicly about abuse of the prophetic in our movement. Back in the 1990s, we didn't have podcasts or social media posts; I did my work in old-fashioned paper and ink. But the people were warned and the perpetrators of the fraud were confronted.

Why do these scandals keep happening? Obviously our common enemy, Satan, is still working overtime to deceive and destroy. But this is not just about the devil's work. I believe many charismatics are so fervent about experiencing supernatural spiritual gifts that they end up being gullible when crafty charlatans pretend to have those gifts.

I always teach the churches I visit that if we truly want to see spiritual gifts in operation, we need ALL of them—and that includes the gift of discernment mentioned by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:10. Without discernment we are powerless when the imposters invade the church. I have also emphasized that a minister who wants spiritual gifts must make sure to build a foundation of the fruit of the Spirit.

Gifts without fruit, Paul told us, are like loud gongs—noisy, distracting and devoid of eternal impact. Anointing without

character is dangerous!

Jesus said imposters would come. Don't fall for their tricks! Pray for discernment. The Spirit provides discernment so we can tell the difference between the genuine and the fake. If you pray for discernment, you will feel a warning in your gut when someone teaches false doctrine or uses manipulation to deceive or swindle you.

God can train your senses so you can hear the alarm and detect spiritual danger. Then you can warn and protect others.

J. Lee Grady is an author, award-winning journalist and ordained minister. He served as a news writer and magazine editor for many years before launching into full-time ministry. Lee is the author of six books, including *10 Lies the Church Tells Women*, *10 Lies Men Believe* and *Fearless Daughters of the Bible*. His years at *Charisma* magazine also gave him a unique perspective of the Spirit-filled church and led him to write *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale* and *Set My Heart on Fire*, which is a Bible study on the work of the Holy Spirit.