

Prophets and Accountability

For several years I've had the privilege of attending a "roundtable" discussion of charismatic leaders hosted by Rick Joyner. In 1991, the first year I attended, several leaders commented in the last session about how nice it was to be in a group that represented a cross section of the body of Christ.

Their remarks surprised me because I noticed that most of the people there were Rick's friends—hardly a sampling of the church in America. So I pointed out that several Christian groups were lacking representation—most noticeably women, Roman Catholics and African Americans.

A week later Rick wrote me a letter saying he had decided I was right—the group did need more diversity. And the next year he remembered to invite some Roman Catholics and African Americans.

This incident illustrates a paradox about Rick Joyner, a prophetic leader who is the subject of a feature article in this issue (page 62). He seems genuinely to want spiritual input from his peers. He does not control the roundtable discussions; he invites contradicting voices to speak up; and if he believes he is wrong, he is quick to repent.

But the fact that he initially invited only a few close friends and believed the group to be an accurate representation of the body of Christ also shows some spiritual myopia. Of course he's not the only leader to have a narrow view; it's a common malady.

But it is more dangerous, I believe, when it affects prophets because they speak for the Lord. At times their own opinions get so mixed up with what they are hearing that they can't seem to sort out what is God and what isn't. If they are independent and have little or no spiritual oversight, the inaccurate "prophetic" words they speak can wreak havoc.

I believe the church needs prophets—men and women willing to boldly speak the Word of the Lord in order to call sinners to repentance and warn of dangers. We need Jonahs to bring us to our knees and Josephs to encourage us to prepare for hard times.

But what about the prophets who predicted a Y2K disaster? No disaster occurred. Yet there was no public discipline of those who "missed it."

A year before Y2K at Rick's roundtable, each participant had an opportunity to say whether he thought disaster would come. One minister said his church had a pump on their property in case the city water was cut off! Others said they weren't sure if anything would happen.

Another year the leaders of the roundtable lamented the mess in government and wondered why there are no prophetic voices from the spiritual community speaking up—just secular commentators. The answer is very simple: Most spiritual leaders in this country lead nonprofit organizations and are prohibited by law from getting involved in politics.

The domain of the prophetic seems to be limited to blessings, new jobs and babies. A prophet I know prophesied babies for the wives of two close friends several years ago. So far, no

babies, and both wives are now over 40.

Why is it that when this sort of thing happens nothing is ever said? Instead, prophets and prophetesses continue to tickle the ears of those who flock to their meetings hoping for a “word from God.”

I know God has used Rick Joyner powerfully. I respect him and love him as a brother. I consider him a friend.

But I believe our feature story on Rick Joyner shows that prophets can become “Lone Rangers,” giving prophecies that never come to pass without correction. We need prophets to speak to the church, but they must be responsible for what they say and willing to accept reproof as Rick has done at his roundtables.

With the fractured nature of the church today there is no central place where these things are judged. It’s a problem not only with the prophetic but with other issues such as immorality and divorce among leaders. Instead of holding leaders accountable, everyone looks the other way.

Rick Joyner came out of nowhere a few years ago. Though he has few credentials, God has raised him up as a prophet. How he reacts toward his critics will determine the direction of his ministry for the next two decades. The same holds true for all who attempt to speak for the Lord.

Stephen Strang is the founding editor and publisher of Charisma. You can e-mail him at @.