

Prophetic Words Are Not for Sale

Years ago, I met a flamboyant preacher from New York. He was very popular, but something about him was really creepy. He claimed to be a prophet, and he was applauded for his uncanny ability to “read people’s mail.” But he strutted arrogantly on the stage, spoke harshly to his staff and spent a lot of time taking up offerings.

Then he launched a website and encouraged his followers to register for “monthly prophetic words.” You could purchase these personal messages once a month or pay \$365 for a full year of prophecies. Once I called his ministry’s office and recorded this man making his “sales,” just so I would have proof that he charged people a fee to hear from God for them.

I wasn’t sure which was worse—that a conniving minister could be that corrupt, or that naïve Christians could actually trust a swindler to give them divine guidance.

That was more than 20 years ago. I thought these kinds of charismatic shenanigans had ended, but I found out last week that the disturbing trend continues in the era of PayPal. One ministry now encourages people to fork out \$30 a month for a regular prophetic word.

I believe in the gift of prophecy. Friends as well as strangers have shared powerful prophetic messages with me that brought encouragement, comfort and confirmation of what God was already saying to me. I have also given many words of prophetic encouragement to others. But every good gift has its counterfeit—and the devil stays busy offering cheap substitutes for the Holy Spirit’s anointing.

Please don’t fall for this trick! If you or someone you know has come under the spell of a charlatan, please take note of

these simple principles:

1. **God wants you to hear from Him directly.** If you are a born-again Christian, you have the Holy Spirit living inside of you—and He wants close fellowship. People in the Old Testament had to visit a priest to obtain God's guidance, as well as forgiveness of sins. Today, because of what Jesus did for us, we have direct access to God. We are all priests (see 1 Pet. 2:9).

It is idolatry to put a man in the place of God and expect him to show you the future or trust him to guide your life. That doesn't mean the Lord will not sometimes use a person to teach, mentor, correct or give you a message from God. But we must never worship the human vessel God uses. Instead of chasing a prophet for a word (or paying him or her for it), read your Bible and pray. Expect God to speak to you. If you need a prophecy, God knows where you live, and He can send His messengers to you. And the best part? It's free!

2. **There's no biblical basis, ever, for charging for a prophecy.** In the prophet Samuel's farewell address to Israel, he reminded the people that he had never cheated or swindled anyone. They replied back to him: "You have not defrauded us, nor oppressed us. Neither have you taken anything from any man's hand" (1 Sam. 12:4). The apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders the same thing in his farewell message. He said: "I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothes" (Acts 20:33).

Samuel and Paul reminded us that genuine Christian leaders are humble servants of God, and they never exploit for personal gain. When ministers in the New Testament preached, healed the sick or prophesied, they did it without expectation of reward. And when people give tithes or offerings to a church or a preacher, the money is never payment for a spiritual gift. It is blasphemous to suggest that God's guidance, healing or favor can be bought.

3. People who sell spiritual gifts have corrupt character.

After Elisha prayed for Naaman's healing, Naaman tried to give Elisha an offering—but the prophet refused to take it. Then, Elisha's servant, Gehazi, went to Naaman and lied to him—telling him that Elisha really wanted him to give him a gift. Gehazi came home with two big bags of silver and some fancy new clothes, but God judged him for his greed. The moral of this story is simple: Never try to profit from the Lord's miracle power!

When a sorcerer named Simon offered to buy God's supernatural anointing, Peter rebuked him severely by saying: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could purchase the gift of God with money!" (Acts 8:20). That was 2,000 years ago, yet we still have Simons and Gehazis in the church who think they can turn the Holy Spirit's anointing into a get-rich-quick scheme.

No matter what kind of payment plan they offer, or how spiritual they sound, stay as far away as possible from charlatans and sorcerers. {eoa}

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