

Joseph Mattera: The Rise of Social Media Prophets

Since the mid-20th century, we have seen the medium of communication go from a dependency upon the printed book (1517-1950) to broadcasting via radio and TV (1950-2010) to the present digital age.

The results have been nothing short of a seismic shift related to the amount of access the average person has to unlimited voices and information! This has served to be both a blessing and a curse.

It's a blessing because more pertinent information related to every subject is now available to the masses (In other words, the American Medical Association no longer has a stranglehold related to what is promoted regarding nutrition and preventative health research). Related to the church, as recently as two decades ago, the evangelical church was influenced by only a small collective of prominent voices (such as James Dobson, Pat Robertson, Billy Graham and more) who could sway the evangelical church politically and doctrinally with their teachings on radio and TV. Now, there are multitudes of Christian "influencers" who have garnered a huge following because of media-savvy content (hence, it no longer takes a budget of millions of dollars to attract a wide audience).

Out of this "flat earth" Christian milieu, there are now numerous self-proclaimed prophets proclaiming what they say is "the word of the Lord" to both the body of Christ and the nations. While many of these prophetic people may be sincere Christ-followers (some are charlatans doing it for filthy lucre), the biblical way to disseminate prophetic words is in the context of the local church gathering, especially so that mature prophetic/leader types can judge said word. This method

of vetting words is vital for the health and safety of the church as well as to ensure proper pastoral application of the word to the recipient.

Related to this vetting principle, the apostle Paul said the following, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said” (1 Cor. 14:29, ESV). Furthermore, all the manifestations of the Spirit (including prophecy) were taught by Paul in the context of the local church gathering—which included the observance of the Lord’s Supper, starting from 1 Corinthians 11:17 to the end of 1 Corinthians 14 (hence, the healthy and biblical practice of the gift of prophecy should have a corporate dynamic).

Unfortunately, despite these clear instructions in the New Testament, I have heard of numerous people in the body of Christ following so-called “internet” prophets who now find themselves with the ability to reach a huge audience—without paying the price of being vetted as a mature leader in a local congregation (1 Tim. 3:1-12). Although we don’t know their life, their track record, personal ethics, the state of their marriage and family and their accountability structure, they can deliver a purported prophecy that excites and inspires multitudes! Furthermore, many of these same people are promoting “prophetic events” via social media by offering “a word of the Lord” to all who attend, while at the same time bypassing the local church and the spiritual leaders God has assigned to shepherd the (naive) believer enticed to these events because they constantly appear on Facebook, Instagram and other mediums of media.

I remember not that long ago, a certain prophetic voice started using their social media platform to hold meetings in a hotel in New York City. Prophetic words were given to people from other churches—including our church—*without* their pastor-elder or mature leaders being present to judge said words. Thankfully I was able to speak to one of the leaders facilitating these events. They apologized and were just

ignorant of the proper biblical procedures related to conducting prophetic ministry, and they stopped these meetings. I wish all the prophetic leaders were as open and accountable as this person was!

The writer of Hebrews said, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you" (13:17). With all of the strange teachings, questionable doctrines and unaccountable prophetic voices prevalent today in the plethora of cacophonous voices to the church today, it is getting increasingly difficult for contemporary shepherds of local churches to faithfully feed the flock.

The only recourse for shepherds of churches is to continue to be faithful by consistently teaching, making disciples and preaching the whole counsel of God both in public gatherings and house to house. This is the only way the sheep can have more discernment and flee from unaccountable prophetic leaders and strange doctrines that incite questions rather than godly edifying (Acts 20:25-32, 1 Tim. 1:3-7, Heb. 13:9.)

May all nine manifestations of the Spirit flourish for the edification of the body of Christ, so that Jesus will be glorified in His church, amen. (Read about how the nine manifestations of the Holy Spirit were taught in the context of the local church by reading 1 Corinthians 12:4-27.)

Finally, since there are now so many unvetted platforms for prophetic voices, it behooves the church to be able to discern the difference between "rogue" and "real" prophets.

Note: This article is an excerpt from a chapter in Bishop Joseph Mattera's latest book, The Purpose, Power, and Process of Prophetic Ministry. {eoa}

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