

Taking the Pathetic Out of the Prophetic

The misuse of prophecy has brought great embarrassment to the church. It's time to clean up our act and apply biblical standards.

Thirty years ago, prophetic ministry dramatically altered the course of my life. God sent a seasoned prophetic woman all the way from Israel to Dallas in order to have a three-minute telephone conversation with me via a radio program.

This encounter completely changed my career and life expectations and thrust me into ministry. It is an example of the power of true prophetic ministry—something that is desperately needed in difficult times.

But when I look at the broad spectrum of prophetic ministry today, I become concerned. I fear that a lot of us have gone off course, and it is going to take more than a shift in attitude to get us back.

It is going to take sweeping, all-inclusive prophetic reformation—reformation that begins within prophetic individuals, not the church. The way prophetic people view themselves must radically change first, and only then will the church change the way it views prophetic ministry.

For too long we have embraced the following erroneous beliefs. They are common in the church today, and all of them work *against* the prophetic.

It's OK to "prophecy" whatever we want in the name of the Lord. Too many "prophetic" words inundate the Web, go out via e-mail and "appear" in videos all over the Internet. If all of them were mature and accurate words from the Lord, I would have little to say here, but most are not. And no one is

addressing the error; words that do not come to pass are simply forgotten instead of corrected.

It seems as if we are living in denial, believing that God does not care when we attach His name to a word He has not actually spoken. Do we not understand that this is taking God's name in vain?

Grace is a license for sin. Many of us have developed a habit of "managing" sin rather than seeking to live a holy life. "Grace" is touted as the trump card, and anyone who sees grace in a different light is automatically discounted as being legalistic or as having a spirit of self-righteousness.

But at what point does the embracing of grace turn into the endorsement of ungodly behavior?

A person is defined by his gifts. All of us have probably heard about prophetic individuals who are supposedly "essential" to a particular move of God, but when we make any man or woman the foundation for God's actions, we are coming perilously close to turning the gift into an idol. This belief has resulted in an entire generation of young men and women who base their identity so heavily on their gifts that when they are questioned about their words or behavior, they act as if God Himself is being called on the carpet.

When did the gift of the prophet become more important than the purity of the Word?

Gifts are more important than character. The weighty emphasis placed on various gifts promotes the idea that gifting is more important than character. In one prophetic magazine, the editor wrote that it is unbiblical to believe that a person's character is more important than his gift—but his statement is clearly not correct.

Character has several facets, not the least of which is love. The apostle Paul wrote that without love we are nothing, no

matter how accurate our prophetic gift (see 1 Cor. 13:2). His statement alone is biblical proof that character is more important than gifting.

Furthermore, we are told in Matthew 7:22-23 that many will prophesy and do signs and wonders—all the while living in rebellion. They will bring genuine healing, prophetic words and deliverance to others, but in the end, God will say they are lawless and that He doesn't know (have relationship with) them.

Unfortunately, it seems as if we are living in a Samson-esque era in which gifts are embraced and character is overlooked. We have promoted the gift over knowing God and His ways, and in so doing, we have become primed for the Antichrist's appearance. What will we do when he comes and performs actual, powerful miracles? Will we ourselves be part of the great deception?

How will we be able to judge the holy from the profane if godly character is not our plumb line? Remember, the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden did not appear evil—it was a type of good that wasn't from God. A righteous lifestyle helps each of us discern the difference between *good* and *God* and keeps us from making the same mistakes Adam and Eve did.

It's not wrong to promote ungodly ministers. Make no mistake about it: Our nation views anyone who is on Christian TV as an example of Christianity—as well they should! The problem is that some ministers who appear on television are not *good* examples because of their ungodly lifestyles. By supporting those who commit adultery, divorce their spouses and engage in sexual immorality, we promote these behaviors and encourage Christians as well as non-Christians to think they are OK.

Three Ways to Reform Prophetic Ministry

I believe there are three things every believer called to

prophetic ministry can do to produce a change: grow in character; develop his prophetic gift; and learn the true role of the prophet in the church.

1. Grow in character.

The character of every prophet is tested before the word the Lord has given comes to pass (see Ps. 105:19). Like Joseph, we must establish prophetic credibility and character before we will be given any prophetic authority. Then, and only then, can we expect pastors and other people to give us favor, listen, understand and take action on anything the Lord speaks through us.

There must be more mature, prophetically gifted people who are willing to stand up for the absolutes of God. Every mature prophet learns that “he who rules his spirit [is better] than he who takes a city” (Prov. 16:32, NKJV) and that the Lord dwells with “him who has a contrite and humble spirit” (Is. 57:15).

We need prophets who ooze the beatitudes and abundantly exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. These characteristics are precisely what define maturity.

2. Develop your prophetic gift.

The word “prophet” is more of a function than a title. In Scripture it is most often used as a verb (“prophesy”) rather than a noun. In other words, being a prophet is something you *do* rather than someone you *are*.

Also, becoming a prophet is a process, not an instantaneous ministry. Having supernatural experiences does not automatically make you a prophet. Though we can all prophesy, few are called to become prophets, and those who are do not stand before world leaders the day after receiving that calling.

Moses waited 40 years; Samuel waited 25 years; and even Jeremiah, who the Lord said was not too young, waited 17 years before his first prophetic utterance. Waiting on God to mature our gifts seems to be a lost virtue.

During the wait, those called to be prophets must study the gift. Biblical knowledge helps lay the foundation for any future task the Lord might give them. They must learn the differences between a trance and a visitation, a dream and a vision, a translation and a transportation, and so on. All these things are described in Scripture and happened in Scripture.

Would today's prophets know why they happened, how to use them and what to do with them? Current evidence indicates that most would not.

3. Learn the role of the prophet in the church.

Prophets must learn that *edification* is God's heart for the church—and His heart for the gifts as well (see 1 Cor. 14:26). We must study the role, purpose and function of the church, as well as the role, purpose and function of the prophetic in the church, and these two must parallel each other. It is the church that will make known the manifold wisdom of God, and the prophet is just one of the many tools God uses to help the body of Christ reveal this wisdom.

Prophets must be realistic about the maturity of their anointing and gifting. Far too many have demanded authority *today* based on *tomorrow's* anointing. In our insecurity, we have spoken our own opinions as if they were from God, and we have lost our fear of God and our concern for the long-term consequences of sin.

However, I believe there is hope for things to change. I am convinced that the application of these three principles to our lives will determine every action we take and every word we speak.

It will determine how we approach the pastor, the relationship we have with the church body and the way our gifts are received, as well as the manner in which we respond to criticism. It will be hard, but nothing in God's kingdom comes without deep commitment to the cause.

The solution lies within us—in our own personal reformation. It must take root in us individually before it will grow and become a corporate move that will reform prophetic ministry and the church as a whole. We cannot ask the church to do anything we are not willing to live out ourselves—and we cannot impart that which we do not have.

Those who allow this reformation to shape their personal lives and ministries will stand a chance of becoming the “Samuels” of tomorrow. May the day come when it is said of us, “All that they prophesy comes to pass, because all that they prophesy comes from God” (see 1 Sam. 3:19).

John Paul Jackson *is the founder of Streams Ministries International () and a popular speaker at conferences and churches around the world. He is well-known for his work in prophetic evangelism and dream interpretation as well as for his best-selling books.*