

13 Prophetic Practices That Are Detrimental to the Church

As I was musing over prophetic ministry, I have come up with some of the top practices I think are either harmful or manipulative. I write this article as someone who has been involved in some form of prophetic ministry for more than three decades. Consequently, I have witnessed the “good, the bad and the ugly”! (My experience has been overwhelmingly positive.)

My purpose in writing this article is to encourage best practices for the edification of the local church and beyond (in no particular order).

1. Unaccountable Prophets

I have learned never to invite a prophetic leader to minister if I do not know who they are aligned with (in other words, who do they have to mediate if a sin or moral violation is uncovered in their life?).

One of the most dangerous weapons in the hand of our enemy is an anointed leader who is not accountable to anybody else.

2. Individualistic Prophetic Words

All prophecies, both in the Old and New Testaments, were given in the context of the assembly of the Lord.

There was no such thing as “individual destiny,” “individual vision” or personal, isolated words. Even prophetic words given to individuals in the Old Testament were either directly or indirectly related to the recipient’s assignment for the nation of Israel.

In the New Testament, the gifts of the Spirit (including prophecy) were enumerated in detail by Paul the apostle in the

context of Holy Communion, discerning the church and with the understanding of the corporate body of Christ. (See the manifestations of the Spirit explained in 1 Corinthians 12:4-8, which was written in the context of the church gathering that started in chapter 11, explicated corporately in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30, and applied and judged by other prophetic people in the assembly as seen in 1 Corinthians 14:29.)

3. Flattering Words

I have seen prophetic people come into churches and flatter the pastor and other key leaders in the church (whether it was motivated intentionally or unconsciously, I do not know).

I cannot tell you how many pastors I have met who claimed they received a prophetic word declaring them to be “an apostle” or that “their church will be the congregation to usher revival into their region.” These kind of prophetic words excite the congregation and the pastor, but unfortunately, most of the time, the only result is that the prophet gets invited back since it generated excitement! (And if said prophetic words do not come to pass the prophet can always get off the hook by stating that “the prophetic words are always conditional” upon the faith and obedience of the recipients!)

4. Soulish Words

I had one person come into our church on two occasions who only prophesied accurately regarding the persons he had prior knowledge of based upon conversations with me. When he prophesied over those he had no prior knowledge of he missed it by a mile! (I subsequently strongly corrected this prophetic person and never had him back again.) Since that bad experience, I never speak about anything or anybody in our church to a prophetic person I invite to minister to the house.

I have also seen some people (in our own local church)

prophecy out of their own soul based on internal issues they were grappling with that they attempted to put on the rest of the church. In addition, I have witnessed people prophecy to the church that which was personally troubling them or convicting them. Instead of recognizing that the word was solely for them, they spoke it out to the church. (In essence, they denied the word was for them and tried to get everyone else to be convicted!)

5. Words Given to Wealthy People

I have noticed that some prophetic people habitually find the wealthiest people in a local church and give them prophecies. Unfortunately, I believe the underlying motivation some have is to make a personal connection with “money people” so they can stay in touch with them and be personally supported.

6. Match-Making Words

Over the years I have seen prophecies come forth (only a few times, thank the Lord!) that attempted to connect two people together or paint a vivid picture of what their future spouse will look like.

By and large, these words are usually inaccurate and can cause much consternation, confusion and hurt for the recipients of the prophetic word. (Many will go everywhere trying to match the vivid picture of the prophecy with every person they meet and wonder “if this is the person” mentioned in the prophecy that they should marry!)

7. Words Commissioning People as Apostles to Nations

In the past few decades I have seen people being proclaimed as “apostles to certain cities or nations.” This can damage the recipient of the prophetic word (it can puff them up with pride and presumption) as well as the body of Christ in their region (pastors will have their guard up, wondering if and when the so-called “apostle” will attempt to exert authority

over them in their region).

Truth be told, in certain complex cities like New York City, there are so many people, streams, denominations and networks (not even including the various ethnic networks that do not speak or understand English), that there will usually never be “one apostle” to a city, but a divergence of apostolic gifts that can contextualize and speak to the needs of the whole city. (The Jerusalem church had 12 apostles, not one.)

8. Words Assigning a Governmental Role in the Local Church

I have had prophetic people prophesy to our congregation, sending me out of the house as a trans-local minister and appointing one of the associate pastors as my successor (this happened in the late 1980s and was not only bad protocol, but an inaccurate word!).

We now give out guidelines and protocols to visiting ministers instructing them never to appoint a person in our church an elder, or a leader, or “send them out of the house” (or be a match-maker) without first privately clearing the prophetic word with myself or one of our elders.

9. Words That Point Back to the Prophet

According to 1 Corinthians 12:3, when the Holy Spirit speaks He always exalts Jesus as Lord; in other words, the Spirit points back to Jesus and glorifies God. If and when a prophetic word comes forth that exalts or praises the speaker (or prophet), that is a warning that both the prophetic word and the prophet are out of line and should be shut down.

10. Words That Violate the Plain Teaching of Scripture

I hope it is obvious that any prophetic word that comes forth that violates one of the cardinal tenets of Scripture should be discarded.

So-called prophetic people who preach a different gospel, or

heretical views related to the Triune God or that contradict the Word of God, should be strongly corrected. (And in many cases sat down from ministry until they demonstrate they understand the elementary doctrines of the faith.)

Proverbs 30:5 (ESV) says: "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar."

11. Prophecies Given Without Pastoral Oversight and Application

I always cringe when I see prophetic gatherings open to the public wherein prophetic words are given to believers without their pastor, elder or mature leader required to be present to judge the prophetic words.

First Corinthians 14:29 and 1 Thessalonians 5:21 both require that every prophetic word be judged in the context of the local church: How can a conference speaker or stranger judge and apply a prophetic word accurately without understanding the life history and context of the individual they give a prophetic word to?

Giving prophetic words without a mature leader present is both dangerous to the one delivering the prophetic word (because said prophetic word can be taken out of context) and to the one hearing it (because most people are guilty of selective hearing and will only like certain parts of the word and ignore the corrective aspects of it).

12. Self-Appointed Social Media Prophets and Prophecies

With the advent of social media, self-appointed prophets have now arisen who frequently give prophetic words to cities, nations and even individuals.

Who are these people? Who has vetted their life and ministry? How healthy is their marriage? Who are they accountable to?

Unfortunately, charismatic, media-smart, anointed people can utilize social media to garner a huge platform; while at the same time bypassing the grid of the local church along with biblical criteria for leadership (see 1 Tim. 3:1-8).

13. When People Prophecy Beyond Their Faith and Grace Gift

I have witnessed many people who were accurate when it came to dispensing individual prophecies, but who missed it big time when they attempted to give prophetic words to cities, regions and nations.

Very few have been able to transition from an individual to a corporate anointing in the prophetic. People make the mistake of thinking that just because they have a grace upon their life to minister to individuals, they can eventually graduate to ministering to nations, but this is not always a certainty.

In conclusion, may the Lord grant the body of Christ the ability to appreciate and celebrate this powerful and profound gift of prophecy (Paul singled out prophecy more than other gifts because of its great ability to edify the church; see 1 Corinthians 14:2,5), as well as to properly train and nurture prophetic people so that we may avoid the prophetic missteps stated in this article.