

6 Ways to Discern Between Rogue and Real Prophetic Ministries

There has been a rise in recent days of prophetic ministries and leaders who are appealing to masses of believers via social media (instead of through local churches) by promising them personal “prophetic ministry.”

This is troubling to me on several levels, since many of the people attending these conferences are not seasoned leaders of churches but are people lacking biblical depth and discernment.

I have learned, as a pastor since 1984, that if you want to fill up a room you promote an event by giving the impression that everyone has a chance to receive personal prophetic words. (Or give away free pizza!)

This is a far cry from the late 1940s, when the prophetic movement began to have a resurgence and ministry was offered by those who participated in a “prophetic presbytery” made up of three to five seasoned leaders who would judge each other’s words and participate as a team of elders praying over the people looking for a word from the Lord.

Now, many are attending conferences without their pastor and or church elder and receiving “personal words” from trans-local ministers without the authority or the pastoral oversight these people need to practically walk out these words. This is of course different from when pastors and seasoned leaders gather for mutual edification, instruction and prophetic ministry. However, even in this case, prophetic words should be recorded as well as judged by other leaders to protect both the prophet and the recipient. (Sometimes, a person can take a prophetic word out of context and claim

somebody said something they really did not say or imply.)

Furthermore, when we examine prophetic ministry in the New Testament, the best guide is that given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14. We see in the New Testament several things of note related to this topic:

1. Most prophecies are merely an expression of the simple gift of prophecy as described in 1 Cor. 14:3, which says, "he who prophesies speaks to men for their edification and exhortation and comfort."

In this context, Paul says that all believers should desire spiritual gifts (14:1) especially that they prophesy (14:1), since prophecy edifies the church (14:4).

2. Since this is a gift all should crave (even as Moses also alluded to in Num. 11:29), this is different from those whose primary ascension gift ministry is that of prophet as described in Ephesians 4:11.

That is to say, since many people can operate freely (and with practice-develop accuracy) with the simple gift of prophecy (like many in these rogue movements), they confer upon themselves the so-called "office of prophet" even though they lack the experience, leadership, anointing and calling of the Ephesians 4:11 ascension gift of prophet.

3. The office or ministry function of prophet is not to be claimed by all who have the simple gift of prophecy as found in 1 Corinthians 14:3; since all Christians are encouraged to operate in this gift, while the Ephesians 4:11 gift of the prophet is only for some, based on their specific assignment in the church place and workplace according to the context of these two passages.

4. Those who function in the church place ministry gift of prophet should also have a foundational ministry that includes oversight and governance according to various Scripture

references. (See 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20, 4:11,12; and Acts 13:1-2, where it shows that prophets made up part of the oversight team of the church of Antioch.)

That being said, some of these prophetic conferences have folks unattached, unaccountable and disconnected from a local church—going around gathering crowds giving “words”—because the average immature believer is mesmerized by the prophetic due to the fact that they lack the maturity in the word and Spirit necessary to discern the voice of the Lord for themselves.

Therefore, before a person goes to a so-called “prophetic conference,” they should first find out what group these “prophetic people” belong to, what church they attend, what leadership role they have in a local church and to whom they are accountable and or who is their oversight? Without understanding these foundational questions, it is foolish (and sometimes even dangerous) to sit under these ministries. It is also unwise to receive prophetic ministry without your local church elder, mentor and/or pastor present to judge and help apply and interpret said word.

5. In the context of Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 14, prophecy should be given to edify the church—*not* disconnect people from their church or *not* apart from their local church. Consequently, the simple gift of prophecy works best in a house meeting or small group environment and or during a local church assembly, if it is to function according to the biblical pattern. One of the primary reasons for this is because prophetic words given in the context of the local church usually find a safer environment than those given in rogue conferences (or parking lots) because they can be judged by other leaders and trusted prophetic people (14:29).

Of course, this is vastly different from prophetic evangelism, the primary methodology employed by Jesus when He was ministering the Good News to others.

He usually walked in the spiritual gifts of the word of knowledge and wisdom (see 1 Cor. 12:4-8) when speaking to others which helped authenticate His ministry in the minds of those who met Him for the first time (see John 1:46-49 and 4:16-19).

That being said, when ministering to strangers or the unchurched we meet in an airport, on the street or working out in the gym, there is nothing wrong with moving in the prophetic gifts the way Jesus did (outside of a church service) to demonstrate to people the reality of the God who sees, knows and loves them.

Consequently, we have to learn to differentiate between the proper biblical protocols between prophetic evangelism for salvation and or edification to strangers we may never see again (who may even be fellow believers you happen to meet who needed an encouraging prophetic word from a stranger as a sign to them of God's love) and the use of prophecy as a vehicle to edify and equip individuals in the context of the church.

6. Last but not least, the guidelines given by Paul related to the use of spiritual gifts as seen in 1 Corinthians chapters 12, 13 and 14, as well as in Ephesians 4:11-16, illustrate the fact that all spiritual gifts are given to edify the church. They are never given as mere individual words to satisfy a person's craving for individual destiny and fulfillment; thus, this individualistic expression of the prophetic doesn't align with Scripture, but is a construct of rugged American individualistic Christianity that trumps individual desire above the well-being of the body of Christ.

Furthermore, there is really no such thing as "personal prophecy" since, all prophecy to individuals found in both the Old and New Testaments had ramifications related to their assignment and call to either the nation of Israel or for the furtherance of the gospel through the local church.

I pray that this article will convict those utilizing their simple gift of prophecy to gather crowds, influence and in some cases—monetary gain. I also pray this serves as a useful guideline pastors can use to help equip and mature Christ-followers under their care, so that the sheep are not misled, scattered and unattached from His body, which is His church.