

Prophets or Fortune Tellers? It's About Time We Learn the Difference

There is a growing false prophetic movement in this country that must be addressed and confronted. Unsound doctrine and counterfeit prophecy are diluting the manifestation of God's presence and power and polluting the landscape of Christianity today.

"Son of man, prophesy against the false prophets of Israel who are inventing their own prophecies. Say to them, 'Listen to the word of the Lord'" (Ezek. 13:2, NLT).

"I have not sent these prophets, yet they run around claiming to speak for me. I have given them no message, yet they go on prophesying. If they had stood before me and listened to me they would have spoken my words, and they would have turned my people from their evil ways and deeds" (Jer. 23:21-22, NLT).

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

While I do believe in the valid ministry of the prophet and have been a personal beneficiary of such ministry, I have also been increasingly alarmed at what passes for true prophetic ministry today.

Here is a typical word of what passes for prophecy today.

"I have called you to a high calling, says the Lord, and I will lift you up to a place of great glory, and money will no longer be a problem for you for I will move on people's hearts who will contribute to your own wealth. You will no longer minister in small circles, but soon television will open up

new arenas to you, and your ministry will be greatly sought after. In that day you will know the favor of your Daddy God and He will increase you more and more.”

Have you heard of a similar word in today’s marketplace of Christianity? A word like that is clearly carnal, man-exalting, and flesh pleasing. It feeds pride, covetousness, and the inordinate affection for recognition and influence that are in people’s hearts. It is the basest form of idolatry.

Examples of such prophecies are numerous in this day, and sadly, the norm. Usually they will address one of three areas in a person’s life: Ministry, money, or marriage. They will speak to a person’s discontentment and need for recognition and promotion or their strong desire to be blessed and happy through possessing the riches and comforts of this life.

Now compare that prophecy to this one.

“I am going to prepare you for the coming days by a hard path that will cause many to cry out continually unto Me. For when the going is easy, men do not seek Me, but rejoice in a temporary blessing. And when that blessing is removed, they so often turn this way and that way but do not come to Me. I am showing you these things in order that you may seek Me continually and with great diligence. As you seek Me, I will open up truths to you that you have not seen before, and these very truths will be such that will enable you to stand in these last days. As you are persecuted, reviled and rejected by your brethren, then you will turn unto Me with all your heart and seek Me for that spiritual life that you need.”

This one speaks of the trials that are part of this Christian life and grants hope of the sustaining spiritual life of the Lord as we seek Him.

The former example speaks of ease, comfort, and the presumed blessing of great ministry and financial prosperity. Due to

the abundance of counterfeit prophecies in this day, you hardly hear the latter any more.

I wouldn't pay a nickel for that first word. There is nothing in it.

It is not that the Lord is opposed to His people being blessed and happy, but such prophecies are dangerous when they feed impure motives already resident in the heart. The true prophetic should direct people's hearts toward God and not our own selfish and soulish desires.

Do you know how many desperate single women have been prophesied to about a future coming husband who never came? Many of them grew bitter with time and their wounds led them into severe depression. Evil spirits attached to such words of divination hang around them for years.

I know of young men who went into the ministry because of a prophecy and it wasted years of their lives and nearly ruined them. Others abruptly changed the course of their previous plans to pursue a prophetic word that pointed them in a different direction. These types of prophecies are like fortune telling that cause great damage to the body of Christ and pollute the land.

Here are three basic differences between the real and the counterfeit prophecies that will help you discern:

1. The counterfeit is man centered and brings excessive attention to the recognition and greatness of man. The real reveals the true heart of God and directs our hearts toward Him.

2. The counterfeit feeds the idolatry in our hearts, which is covetousness (Col. 3:5), and feeds our carnal desires for selfish gain and a satisfaction that's unattached to God's will and heart for us. Real prophecy will offer hope and

encouragement during hardship but often with an exhortation toward humility and praise, or a warning to guard against the selfish motives and the lack of character in our hearts.

3. The counterfeit will drift from the pure written Word with a mixture of flesh/soul, with some spirit added in. But the real will contain within it a solid Scriptural foundation that acts as a sword dividing the flesh/soul from the spirit, or our own desires from God's will.

The root of most prophetic abuses is the covetousness in the hearts of both the giver and recipient of such. False prophets can easily get over into a performance mode that even familiar spirits will accommodate. Familiar spirits know things about people and possess knowledge of their past and present. Some prophecies can also be accurate because those prophets may have a genuine gift but are operating with wrong motives.

Be very careful.

People's love for power will cause them to pursue it more than purity, thus defiling their own hearts. False prophets are like fortune tellers that lead people into deeper idolatry.

We must understand that if there is idolatry already in someone's heart, it will only be strengthened by the dainty prophecies that appeal to their flesh and to their pride. That was the problem in Israel when the majority of the prophets were speaking peace and prosperity and victory, but the Lord saw the idolatry and wanted His people to turn from it. Any prophecy that feeds our carnal and fleshly motives needs to be questioned. Deception will work in us when we receive and embrace words that are not from God.

A true prophet carries an anointing to turn the hearts of the people from sin, self, and idolatry and toward the Lord. And frankly, that is what the church needs most in this hour.

Therein lies a great key that will help you tremendously in

your discernment. What is happening to your heart when the prophecy is being given? Is it strongly being drawn to the Lord or does it merely make you feel special, superior, and even elite? Does it draw you to the Lord or to the person giving you the prophecy? Does it feed your humility or your pride?

The bottom line is that much of what passes as prophetic ministry today, although done in the Lord's name, is not done by His Spirit or according to His heart.

In this 21st century quagmire of idolatrous worship and ministry may we truly be among the remnant that will be taught of the Lord.