

The 5 Biggest Mistakes We Make in Prophetic Ministry

While ministering in Eastern Europe this week, I learned about a church leader who recently aired an audacious claim. He says he was taken to heaven in some sort of fantastic vision and that while in glory he met and talked to the apostle Paul himself.

The clincher is even more ridiculous: This self-appointed leader says Paul commissioned him as an apostle to his country, adding that anyone else who claims to be in that office is going straight to hell. This isn't the most diplomatic way to win followers.

There have always been and always will be religious megalomaniacs who split churches with claims of special revelation. But the saddest part is that men like this give the biblical gift of prophecy a bad name and cause people to be suspicious of anything of a supernatural nature.

While I was overseas I helped teach at a prophetic school that is sponsored annually by a large charismatic church. I shared these points below with the students. I think they will help you in your local church, especially if you want to develop a prophetic ministry that is healthy, God-honoring and faithful to the New Testament.

In my experience with prophetic ministry over the years, I believe there are five big mistakes we make in this important area.

1. Giving prophets elite status. Nowhere in the New Testament are prophets exalted to a privileged class. Paul himself said all members of the body need each other, and in his discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, he warns against ranking spirituality by gifting. He wrote, "The eye cannot say

to the hand, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Cor. 12:21, NASB).

Many prophets get a disease that I call *egotisticus giganticus*. They are puffed up by their revelations. Then, when people line up to hear them, they are forced to come up with more sensational claims—along with names, dates and exotic manifestations. Let's dispense with the arrogance and empower the average Joes and Janes in the local church so they can encourage people through biblical prophetic ministry.

2. Promoting charismatic chaos. Some people act weird when they prophesy in order to get attention. Some shake in funny ways, speak in affected tones or use archaic "Listen thou to me!" lingo. It's okay to be passionate, but you don't need to scare people.

Some have been deceived into thinking that they must shake their heads or scream in order to get their point across. This must have been happening in Corinth, too, but Paul brought swift correction. In New Testament times, pagan prophets spoke in ecstatic speech because they were possessed by demons. But Paul told the Corinthians, "The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" (1 Cor. 14:32).

You should never be out of control when you deliver a word from God. The fruit of the Holy Spirit includes both gentleness and self-control. If you are prophesying like a banshee, you are either influenced by a religious spirit or you need to be ushered out of the room until someone can calm you down.

3. Allowing harsh prophetic words to abuse people. Some people who claim to have the gift of prophecy need to be warned to stop speaking altogether. I know of a church where a lady routinely gave personal words to people warning of calamities or judgments. She even said that God wanted to kill them! Usually these angry "prophets" claim to know all the unconfessed sins in a person's life.

New Testament prophecy is specifically used to encourage, comfort and exhort believers (see 1 Cor. 14:3). That rules out condemnation and harsh criticism disguised as a word from God. Our heavenly Father does not speak to His children in a hateful, scolding tone. He is an encourager, even when He brings correction. Remember: Paul said that if you use the gift of prophecy without love, it is useless (see 1 Cor. 13:2)!

4. Not mentoring prophets. Today we have forgotten the importance of mentorship. We have Bible colleges for preachers, but we neglect training in other vital areas. We wrongly assume that if a person is blessed with a spiritual gift like prophecy, it just flows without any instruction.

In the Old Testament, there were schools of prophets. Second Kings 6:1-6 tells how Elisha went with some younger prophets to build an expansion to their school, and one of the men lost the blade of the axe he was using to cut down trees for timber. Because the older prophet was with the younger ones, the head of the axe was recovered by a miracle Elisha performed. I believe miracles are linked to mentorship. When no mentors are around, we foolishly try to cut down trees with an axe handle—and we end up relying on our own good ideas and programs instead of God's power.

Don't assume you know everything. Don't be so eager to *go* until you *grow* to maturity.

5. Shutting down prophecy because the gift was abused. Because of the problems I've mentioned, some pastors just give up and shut prophecy down. They'd rather have a safe church environment than expose people to any possibility of a prophetic catastrophe.

If this were the wisest thing to do, why didn't Paul clamp down on all charismatic expression among the Corinthians? Things were wild there—with off-the-wall prophecies, out-of-

control prophets and harsh messages.

Yet Paul offered these life-giving words: “Desire earnestly spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1), and he ended his discourse by saying “desire earnestly to prophesy” (v. 39). Shutting down charismatic gifts is unbiblical. Instead of limiting the way God wants to communicate to us, let’s honor the Holy Spirit and learn to exercise prophecy the way He intended.

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