

O, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. (Deut. 32:3-4 NIV)

Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer....when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. (Ps. 61:1-2 KJV)

Dear friends:

Greetings in Christ's name to you dear ones scattered over our beautiful (but sadly beleaguered) planet. It is a great privilege to be able to picture many of you and your locales, a gift to those of us who travel with the gospel on our lips. And it is with profound thanksgiving for the *fruit of that gospel* that this missile comes to you. You have sent in to us the accounts of your healings, your spiritual and emotional transformations--even your miracles--and your stories from the PCM schools of this year alone would fill a book. There is no end to what God does when we come together in His name, invoke His presence, and there, in all our smallness and need, learn to collaborate with Him in the healing of souls.

One of the main reasons we see such lasting and abundant *fruit* in this ministry is that we exult in the Unseen Real, in the Transcendent. We glory in the knowledge that the Holy One is in our midst, that He is glorious, that He comes with His myriads of angelic hosts prepared and ready to do His bidding, that we are taken up into Him, and He descends into us. We come to know this *incarnational reality* (God's presence with and within us) while shaking off the flat, materialistic secular mind-set of the age and its cancerous inroads into our souls. We glimpse and then begin to recover the incomparable Judeo-Christian symbolic system, one largely lost to the church today, and as a result gain a Christian worldview that we never again forget, and through which we henceforth see the world and all that is real and true.

This, in turn, gets us back into the great (often old) writings and wisdom imbued with our matchless Christian worldview, and our minds and imaginations are fed on what is sovereign and solid and good. No longer neglecting the work of the mind, we gain greater understanding of the Scriptures. For example, many, for the first time in their lives, gain understanding of the sacraments and their preciousness, of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the church and in healing prayer, of the *charisms* of the Holy Spirit, of the importance of full worship liturgies--all of which are avenues for God's holiness and transcendence to pour into us. In short, we begin to walk the ancient paths and find our priceless inheritance in Christ--our true selves along with growing insights into the spiritual and intellectual heritage Christ won for us. Yes, friends, we are chock-full of thanksgiving for the work and the fruit of the gospel and the way God has empowered His people to set it forth. And your letters, pouring in, indicate this same joy.

This leads, however, into the grave concern we have over the state of a Western church that has largely lost its inheritance and therefore its capacity to speak truth powerfully into a world dying for the lack of such a word--the

word that is *truly prophetic* and the divinely appointed means for mediating the transcendent and the holy.

The flipside of this loss of the true, the *real*, is the rushing in of the *false prophetic* to fill the vacuum. As Os Guinness writes, “The modern parade of counterfeits is as long as the list of true ones is short. In many Christian circles, ‘prophetic’ is shorthand for uncheckable charismatic hunches or for any left-wing, radical critique of the status quo.”¹ In upcoming newsletters, we hope to concentrate more on what prophecy and the true prophetic really *are*. In the meantime, however, and onerous as the task is, we must begin with warnings about “uncheckable charismatic hunches,” the sins of pride and divination that accompany them, and the spiritual peril that comes to all touched by them. Over the years I have come to term the false prophetic movements as “gnosticism from the right” in order to distinguish them from the gnosticisms emanating out from the “left,” the secular and reductionistic psychologies and ideologies.²

Gnosticism from the Right: "Evil Forms of Prophecy"

Heresies perish not with their authors, but like the river Arethusa, though they lose their currents in one place, they rise up again in another.

Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (seventeenth century)

Modernism is the synthesis of all heresies.

Pope Pius VI (twentieth century)

Heretical movements, old but in new dress, are gaining surprising entrance and acceptance into churches and organizations where we would least expect them, and we lack “watchmen on the wall,” those who effectively warn the church. As Henry David Thoreau spoke of his time, “There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.” And today in the noisy, proliferating Babel of modernity, the splendor of truth flowing from that one truly prophetic voice striking at the root of evil most often goes unheard or unheeded.

Truth flows as living, cleansing, healing water through the prophetic word as revealed in the Scriptures, and our concern is either with its absence, its perversions, or its outright imitations within the church, for all heresy and imbalance has to do with failure to hear and rightly appropriate the Word of God. Our particular concern in this newsletter is with a mushrooming part of the “charismatic” movement, one that is estranged from the wisdom and

¹ Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), p. 21.

² What I refer to as “gnosticism from the left” has spread principally through Jungian and other secular psychologies that penetrated and destroyed the earlier great revival in the mainline churches. This I’ve written about earlier in *The Healing Presence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books), pp. 203-16. Also see Jeffrey Satinover, “Jungians and Gnostics,” *First Things* (October 1994): 41-48; Jeffrey Satinover, *The Empty Self: Gnostic Foundations of Modern Identity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994).

knowledge of the past and therefore gone seriously wrong. It is my belief that if its errors are not recognized and fully exposed, it will soon dwarf even such cults as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons. That is because, through pointing its individual "prophecies" toward the ego, thus constellating a drive toward personal power in man and woman, it strongly appeals to the masses of the unaffirmed and to the mind-set of our narcissistic age. Though in our writings and in our Pastoral Care Ministry schools we have long warned of these dangers, we are more deeply aware than ever of the gnosticisms flooding into evangelical (and other) circles through false prophecies--divinations that spin new myths, new "knowledge," lying words (even entire myths and fantasies), that bring all who receive them under the most serious spiritual deceptions. St. Paul terms them evil forms:

*The Spirit do not quench; prophecies do not despise; but test all things: hold fast to what is good, keep away from every evil form.*³

Groups who tolerate evil forms of prophecy rapidly turn into cults. As Dr. Donald G. Bloesch writes:

Closely related are the terms *cult* and *sect*. While a sect indicates an unbalanced emphasis on some tenet of the faith, a cult connotes a basic departure from the foundations of the faith. A sect is a theological misunderstanding; a cult is a theological aberration. Sects are inclined to be too narrow; many of the cults appear to be too broad.⁴ . . . A sect can evolve into a church, whereas a cult can only be replaced by the church.⁵

In this current movement within the church, we are witnessing the incorporation of individuals and groups into a prophetic cult that is not new, one I first knew about in the late 1950s:

Over 50 years ago, William Branham, George Warnock, Paul Cain and others attempted to introduce Latter Rain/Manifest Sons of God teachings into the Pentecostal movement. In 1949, however, the Assemblies of God officially rejected the Latter Rain/Manifest Sons of God doctrine as "heresy." The cult went underground but surfaced again in the 1960s as the Manchild Company. Disregarding the Assemblies of God decision, Paul Cain, the Kansas City Prophets and Vineyard Ministries have subsequently reintroduced and successfully established this false doctrine in the Pentecostal churches.⁶

³ 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22, trans. Gordon Fee, in *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), pp. 55ff.

⁴ Donald G. Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 145. I recommend chapter 7, "Challenges to Traditional Faith," for study of the matter at hand.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁶ Tim Barbaho, "The Latter Rain Revival," 1997, as quoted in *Apologetics Index*, "About Paul Cain," <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/c06.html>, 11/3/2004.

The Kansas City Prophets gained a national and international platform when John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Ministries, came under the spell of the prophet Paul Cain (named in the above), a deception he later saw as the worst mistake of his life. Unfortunately, by the time he acknowledged this, the deception he had come under had spread throughout his organization, and due to his strong endorsement, infected other vital evangelical and charismatic movements as well.

Knowing of the early history of this cult and what grief would come to John and the church through it, I personally contacted him, warning him of the divination involved, but at that time he could not hear and receive the warning. "The fatal error Wimber made was that of equating signs and wonders with the kingdom of God," as one of his pastors, deeply wounded and grieved by the fallout of this movement, told me--a failing all too common in a charismatic movement gone awry.

The history of the bad fruit from this movement has gone strangely unrecorded by the pastors and even *writers* whose ministries and lives have been devastated by it. One told me that the moment he attempts to write out what he has seen and knows, a demonic spirit, dark and threatening, descends into his room, and he experiences a foggy and oppression that end in a full-blown depression. The memories of what happened to the many that he, a pastor, had loved haunt him to this day. Others who know the need to stand up and speak the truth do not do so. In the conflict between unity and truth, they choose unity. Unbelievable as it seems, this conflict is common to modern Christian groups. Dear ones, apart from truth, there is no unity worth having. There is only a *slower* capitulation to the mind-set of the age. The main reason, underlying the others, however, is that demonic deception always closes mouths. All these things underlie the strange silence and explain why, for the past decade and a half, the false prophetic continues to grow, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the *spirituals*, continue to be misrepresented and debased.

These imitations and/or perversions of the gifts are part and parcel of the modern's low view of God, and therefore of His *gifts* to man, and of man himself. To state this in yet another way: It has to do with the tragic loss of the *transcendent* Real (God, the Uncreated), and the substitution of something solely horizontal, paganized, and coming to us from the world, the devil, and our own unassisted minds. We could not have a more important subject.

As P. T. Forsyth has said, "Not to pray is not to discern--not to discern the things that really matter and the powers that really rule."⁷ "Principalities and powers (or authorities)" are the names St. Paul assigns these alien rulers, those spirits in opposition to God--to His holiness, His goodness, His beauty--and to man created in God's image.

⁷ P. T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer* (London: Independent Press, 1960), Memorial Hall, E.C.4., p. 22.

It is a fatal thing to underestimate the enemy; and it is in Christian prayer, seriously and amply pursued, that the soul really learns to gauge evil's awful and superhuman power in affairs. I am speaking not only of the single soul, perhaps at the moment not chiefly, but of the soul and prayer of a society like the true church or a sobered people. The real power of prayer in history is not a fusillade of praying units of whom Christ is the chief, but it is the corporate action of a Saviour-Intercessor and His community, *a volume and energy of prayer organized in a Holy Spirit and in the Church the Spirit creates* (emphasis mine).⁸

This newsletter is a call to discerning prayer such as P. T. Forsyth describes, *real* prayer, because it is *in Christ* and energized by a Holy Spirit once again rightly acknowledged, honored, and therefore *known*. Then, dear ones, in the power of that precious Holy Spirit and His gifts to us, the people of God, the church, will once again bask in the knowledge of the transcendent and the holy. We will once again hallow God the Father's name, and "all things will be ours." We, the church, will know genuine reformation and deliverance from the spirit of the age.

We are greatly indebted to Mark Pertuit for taking time out of a very busy schedule and preparation for his upcoming marriage to write the following.

False Prophets or Genuine Prophetic Leadership?

By Mark Pertuit

Recently, friends with whom I worked for many years decided to relocate and to align their ministry with another ministry that specializes in developing so-called prophetic intercessors. My experience with the people in these prophetic circles, however, led me to conclude that their version of prophecy is not scriptural. Because ministries of this sort are proliferating, it is crucial to be able to recognize these false teachers. Self-proclaimed "prophets" abound today, but many seem to more closely fit the New Testament description of false prophets. Consider the following.

About five years ago, a very well-known "prophet" came to a conference at my church and held a meeting. He prophesied over several of my friends; the fact that I knew most who received the prophecies was remarkable since hundreds of people were there. The "prophet" asked a man and his wife to stand up; he correctly stated that they led an international ministry related to healing and wholeness, which was astonishing since he had no way of knowing them (they were from the South Pacific, and he then lived in Texas). He declared that they were *together* going to have a powerful ministry in South

⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

America. Some time after the conference, while driving the car, the wife died, causing the car to crash; the autopsy revealed that she had died before the car crashed. She had had heart problems, but her death was completely unexpected. Consequently, no such ministry to Latin America ever occurred.

Another friend who received this man's ministry was being stalked by someone at her church. Asking her to stand, the "prophet" rightly named her situation. He strongly declared, "The stalking stops *now*,' says the Lord! It is over! It will not continue!" As he prophesied, she sobbed convulsively, seemingly for joy. However, the very next day she went to church, and the stalker began to pursue her with renewed intensity. Not very long afterwards, she started to become mentally unbalanced.

To another friend of mine, the false prophet said she had had a 10,000-pound psychological wound (which was true) and that God was going to give her a 10,000-pound anointing. He correctly stated that she wanted to have a physical healing ministry for people with AIDS. She, too, sobbed convulsively as he promised that these things would come to pass. Instead, however, soon after this conference, she sinned against someone to whom she was ministering. When she was confronted by her overseer, she disassociated herself from many friends who loved her (myself included) and was not heard from again.

The so-called prophet also spoke to a friend of mine who had been serving in the ministry for which I formerly worked. Months prior to this conference I'd told my friend that I was concerned because he wasn't dealing with the issues related to his homosexual neurosis, and I knew he was struggling. Out of concern for him, I told him it was dangerous to have a ministry to those similarly struggling if one was not dealing with one's own issues. He was enraged. Two months later, because there seemed to be no change in him and because I was still concerned, I confronted him again. Again, he was enraged. Two months later, I did the same thing yet again, and again he was boiling mad. I hated these repeated confrontations, but I spoke to him because I cared for him as a friend. The "prophet" came to the aforementioned conference about a month after the third confrontation and, calling my friend out, said, "You will write a powerful book about healing." Can you guess what my friend's great desire was? To write a book. Can you guess what happened then? Like everyone else who had received a word from this "prophet," things turned sour; my friend had a fall with someone in ministry (two leaders were thus taken out) and subsequently fell again. *Around the time the "prophet" came, what was God really saying to my friend?* "Deal with your issues." *What did the so-called prophet say?* "You will write a powerful book about healing"—an ego-enhancing word that gave him permission to dismiss my valid warning and to become immersed in a grandiose fantasy about God's supposed plans for him.

All of these prophecies seemed amazing when given. They seemed to be signs of the man's obvious prophetic gifting. I had, during the conference, no doubt God was using him. Only a short time afterwards, however, the true fruit

of his ministry became apparent. *It wasn't good fruit that became bad; rather, it was bad fruit from the start.* It had been cleverly (demonically) disguised as good fruit at the time of the so-called prophetic words. In each case, the "prophet" had supernatural knowledge--there's no doubt that the facts he had about each situation could have only come to him supernaturally. But in each case, the post-conference outcome was quite different from what he'd prophesied. In each case, not only did the predictions fail to come true, but the person and situation got worse--much worse. These "prophetic words" were indeed supernatural, but they were not from God. They came from demonic spirits of divination. This man was, and still is, a false prophet—a pseudo-prophet.

Unfortunately, this situation is not an isolated instance. This man, and many others like him, enjoy growing popularity in many sectors of the evangelical church. Because the signs and wonders that accompany them are so dramatic, people are often duped (as I was) into believing in the validity of their ministry. What people often fail to notice, however, is the devastation that frequently follows those who received supposedly prophetic words. To understand what is going on here, to learn to recognize false prophets and pseudo-prophetic movements, we must first get a sense of what a true prophet really is.

Genuine Prophets

In the Scriptures, God's prophets make His mind known to His people. When the people of God strayed from the way of the Lord--which happened with tragic regularity in the Old Testament--God sent prophets to remind them of who He is and what He wants. Prophets called the Israelites to turn from their spiritual adultery, a metaphor used to describe Israel's idolatrous practices--turning from the living God to dead idols. God, like a husband in pursuit of His erring wife, called the people to change their adulterous ways.

In so doing, God was calling all people--then as now--to turn from sin and to do what is holy, good, and true in His sight. The living God showed a constant concern for people, and so His prophets spoke against "moral, ethical, political, economic and religious disenfranchisement."⁹ Where the Israelites lived without a proper orientation to the holy God and therefore without regard to the demands of love and justice, the prophetic call challenged God's people to mend their ways. Prophets, then, were used by God as signposts to His authentic path, warning of the consequences of disobedience.

In addition to denouncing idolatry, one of the most frequent tasks of prophets was to critique Israel for her syncretism. As H. Mowvley points out in *Guide to Old Testament Prophecy*, though they may occur together, idolatry and syncretism should be seen separately. In idolatry the Israelites went after

⁹ Walter Kaiser, *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), "Prophet, Prophetess, Prophecy," <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/bed.cgi?number=T575>

alternative gods--gods made by human hands--rather than pursuing Yahweh. In syncretism, however, Yahweh was confused with other gods, and alien practices were imported into what was supposed to be the worship of Yahweh. People were supposedly drawing near to God in worship, entering "into the presence of a divine King, with expressions of loyalty, but their wills are in no way conformed to his and what they do, they do simply in conformity with custom and habit."¹⁰

God hated this syncretistic worship. As Amos notes (4:4ff.), God sees it as rebellion. Israel's acts of devotion were meaningless to God because their hearts were far from Him: "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them" (Amos 5:21-22).¹¹ Mowley points out that God, staggeringly, considers this worship to be sinful because it purports to do one thing and does another; essentially, they are lying to God, as well as to themselves. The prophets, then, are seen time and again calling the people to serve God with humility and sincerity as they adhere to His ways.¹²

False Prophets

False prophets, or pseudo-prophets, told another story altogether. Walter Kaiser points out some typical characteristics of them as found in the Scriptures. Rather than challenging the people of God to acknowledge and turn from their disobedient behavior, pseudo-prophets spoke words of encouragement to God's erring people. Failing to offer needed challenges, these prophets falsely promised peace. So in the face of moral corruption, the false prophets offered soothing words, lulling the people into complacency with flattering ideas that affirmed their best sense of themselves.

Thus, the gross disobedience of God's people was far from the minds of the false prophets. Rather, they promised these people that God had wonderful things for them, none of which involved a return to God's holy path. Consequences certain to attend evil behavior went unmentioned, and needed warnings went unspoken. Warnings and correction, after all, normally do not win popular applause. And applause, as it turns out, was the real interest of the false prophets.

As Kaiser puts it, the pseudo-prophets sought "popular acclaim with their unconditional pledge of immunity from all disasters."¹³ Israel was promised great blessing, prosperity, provision, and any thoughts of divine discipline were dismissed. God said to Jeremiah,

¹⁰ H. Mowley, *Guide to Old Testament Prophecy* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1979), p. 76-77.

¹¹ Unless otherwise designated, Scripture is taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*[®]. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

¹² Mowley, *Guide to Old Testament Prophecy*, 77-81.

¹³ Kaiser, "False Prophets," in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.

“Say to them, ‘This is what the LORD says: “When men fall down, do they not get up? When a man turns away, does he not return? Why then have these people turned away? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? They cling to deceit; they refuse to return. I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, ‘What have I done?’ Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle.... From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when they are punished,” says the LORD.’” (Jer. 8:4-12)

In essence, the false prophets collaborated with the people in their wickedness. Not discerning the spirit of the age--the common, ungodly ways in which the people interpreted life and lived accordingly--the false prophets spoke *as if* in God’s name, but allowed the people to remain in deceit. They allowed the people to pursue their own evil course, unchecked, and the prophets did the same.

The pseudo-prophets promised that God’s people were secure from harm and disaster--exactly the reverse of what God was often saying. Whereas God was warning His people that their sins had natural consequences and would incur divine discipline, the false prophets acted so as to put any such thoughts--the very ones people needed to hear--out of their minds. So instead of warning of the danger of crossing God’s moral boundaries, false prophets blessed the people in their waywardness, assuring them, as Kaiser notes, of blessings and the continuance of Israel’s monarchy, temple, and covenant.¹⁴

Lastly, the false prophets sometimes employed the magic arts and divination. Divination has to do with seeking supernatural knowledge that does not come from God. As Mowley points out, by utilizing mediums or wizards or by engaging in related practices, the Israelites were denying the supremacy and sufficiency of Yahweh.¹⁵

Note that what happened in the Old Testament continued in the New Testament community as well. Warnings against false prophets are found in various places in the New Testament. False teachers and prophets, the apostles warned the Christian community, are *sure* to come. How did they know that? They knew it because they knew human nature (which tends to seek security, comfort, and acclaim before obedience), because they knew the dreadful history of Israel and her manifold spiritual adulteries, and because they knew that the Enemy has everything to lose with the coming of the gospel. That being the case, a superhuman foe, they knew, would seek to distract God’s people so that they did not seek the living God and live in accordance with His ways, since that spells disaster for Satan’s rival counterfeit kingdom.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mowley, *Guide to Old Testament Prophecy*, p. 76.

For example, Paul warns Timothy that some will “follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). That is, some will teach wrong things, not things resulting from human error but what emanates from the mouth of a satanic foe. These teachings, of course, will not be obviously wrong--hence the need of warning. The Enemy is clever, and when he speaks so as to deceive, he often does it by mixing truth and error. Pure lies are much easier to discern. He also appeals to the ego, to the flesh, that god-complex within each one of us that wants to be the center of the universe, to freely self-determine without reference to God and His ways. But to blatantly urge egoistic behavior is not likely to capture the Christian's attention. A more subtle approach couched in Christian language, dressed up *as though it were* Christian, has a lot more probability of being received.

Elsewhere, Paul writes of one who goes “into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head,” namely Christ (Col. 2:18-19). Paul continues, referring to teachings of people who would lead Christians to embrace religious practices that “have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Col. 2:23). This description is reminiscent of certain ministries that encourage people to leave their lives and jobs so as to pray forty or more hours a week as “prophetic intercessors.” I earlier described several friends of mine who have left their work and now raise funds, in the style of a missionary, so that they can do exactly that. They liken themselves to Anna in the temple (Luke 2:36-38) or to Simeon (Luke 2:25-35). What they seem to miss is that Anna was in her eighties, and Simeon was likewise elderly--not of working age. When people go off to intercede around the clock, asking Christians to financially support them, they forget what Paul taught when he was in Thessalonica: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). Of course prayer is excellent, and God loves that we seek Him--no doubt about it. But He made a world for us to live in and to subdue; God loves the world (John 3:16) and wants us to live as lights in it rather than fleeing from it.

The New Testament warnings about false prophets continue all the way into Revelation where John writes of supernatural manifestations that do not come from God. Frogs come out of the mouth of the beast “and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world” (Rev. 16:13-14). The fact that these frogs jump from their mouths is an allusion to deceptive words. Note also that Jesus mentioned false prophets who would come with miraculous signs in Matthew 24:24. This, of course, is what was happening in the events that I described at the beginning of this article. Out of the mouth of that false prophet came frogs--demonic spirits of divination. And destruction and death frequently follow divination.

So, disturbingly, what happened in the New Testament community is happening again today. Numerous “prophetic” ministries are growing in popularity in sectors of the church not typically open to the gifts of the Holy

Spirit as well as in those that are. These teachers are happy to claim honorific titles--“prophets” and/or “apostles” (in contrast, see Matt. 23:6-13). Such people often travel the nation or beyond, promising revelations to those who come to hear them. These “words” are personal prophecies. Rather than bringing the gospel message (what Christ has commissioned Christian leaders to teach), false prophets instead advertise their ability supposedly to hear from God what the future holds for those who will receive these revelations. Sometimes they will offer God’s future or plan for a local church or ministry. Some of the most popular ones even provide on their Websites an annual report of the future--what God will do this year in the national and/or worldwide church! By advertising these so-called gifts, false prophets are essentially promising personal “readings” of the future. Because the offer is clothed in Christian language, and because the person poses as a holy man or holy woman, Christians often fail to see that *what these people are doing is in no way different from what a psychic, palm-reader, or fortuneteller does.*

Receiving a True Word from God

God certainly does speak to people, and at times God

...gives a personal promise for the future, along with comfort and guidance. We, like Mary, are to hide it away in our hearts, saying, “Be it done to me according to thy word.” We remember it before God in prayer. This foretelling is a valid and vital need to the soul, which this gift fulfills most wonderfully. The Scriptures tell us not to despise it.¹⁶

The “right attitude of heart does not seek to know the future, and does not need to know it in order to be at peace.”¹⁷ Rather, the Christian is called to trust in the Lord and to derive peace from remembering His promises and His faithfulness.

When God does speak a word about the future, He does so sovereignly, according to His will, way, and timing. To seek such words--or to go even further and to promise people that you will provide such words--is contrary to God’s ways and, in fact, opens one up to occult divination.

God calls all Christians to learn to listen to Him themselves, not seek out mediums, soothsayers, and diviners (even if they pose as Christian prophets). Of course, God does sometimes use other people to address us. Nevertheless, all of us are called to learn to listen to God so that we can stand aright before Him rather than bending into self-appointed oracles who pose as spokespersons for Jesus Christ.

Consider the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:14ff.: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.... [God then tells Moses, in verses 19-20] If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him

¹⁶ Leanne Payne, *Listening Prayer* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), p. 90.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

to account.” In Acts 3:22, we discover that this Prophet is none other than Jesus Christ. Thus Moses prophesied about the God who speaks: Each person, God Himself states, must listen to Him--implying what other Old Testament prophets later said, that God will speak to each individual.

Of course, we are to listen to God in the context of community wherein we adhere to the Scriptures as the standard against which any word is judged. When we listen in fellowship with other Christians, God can use them to check us if we are hearing amiss. Nevertheless, we all ultimately need to learn to discern for ourselves, because every Christian can hear God. For example, God told Joel, “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on *all people*. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28-29, italics added).¹⁸

Today’s false prophets disregard the fact that God speaks to each person. Though they may say they teach people to listen to God, and may seem to do so, they still position themselves as spokespersons for God. They offer nothing more than fortunetelling, cleverly dressed up in Christian language such that it often passes for the work of God. These “words” are inevitably ego-enhancing, speaking to the proud or self-important false self. They are couched as encouraging/uplifting (and often subjectively felt to be so by those who receive them). As one person once said, false prophets’ words are almost never modest, as in, “You’ll be the pastor of a church of twenty-three people in Greenland, and nobody will ever hear of you, but God will be very pleased with you and your church.” Rather, massive things are promised, setting up recipients for pride: “You will lead thousands to Christ.” The setup occurs in the sense that false prophets boost people onto pedestals, readying them for the falls that follow pride. This is the work of the Adversary, who seeks to trip up the servants of God. By posing as listeners of God for others, rather than teaching people to listen to God for themselves, and by presuming to give “words” about people’s futures, they are practicing divination.

For example, the brochure for one conference promised that the prayer team would deliver a ten-minute prophetic word from God to each participant. But how can anyone advertise that God will speak for ten minutes to everyone who comes? This is presumption, and to promise such things opens the ones who “prophesy” to spirits of divination. Rather than praying and being open to words that God might sovereignly choose to give, they instead presume that He will give, advertising it. While they seem to be advertising God’s goodness, they are in fact advertising their “gifting.”

¹⁸ See also John 10:1-18.

Characteristics of False Prophets

What then are some signs that you might be in the presence of a false teacher or prophet?

- Rather than ministering the gospel--the message of Jesus Christ--and leaving to God any signs and wonders He may or may not want to perform, they offer experience-oriented performances that bring glory to themselves.

In his helpful book *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, Ken Blue offers these indications:¹⁹

- False prophets like to claim specialness: They are the remnant, heading the only group proclaiming truth, God's cutting edge, God's end-times army. (As Blue notes, it's normal to imagine oneself as a hero--such as a general in God's end-times army--at age six; as an adult, this is a sign of narcissism. Yet this kind of narcissism is ubiquitous in false prophets.)
- Pseudo-prophets make extraordinary claims for themselves: They are God's anointed;²⁰ they have unprecedented encounters with God, revelations of truth not available to other people through ordinary reading of the Scripture, and secret knowledge of God's end-time purposes (read: gnostic claims).
- Once special status is achieved, they cease being accountable. After all, who can challenge the prophet to whom God constantly sends dramatic revelatory experiences? The rest of us are only foolish children under the wise prophet-leader-adult.

Take, for example, the statement in the first paragraph on one famous false prophet's Website: "Bob seems to walk with the Lord both day and night, and the supernatural is an everyday occurrence to Bob." Further on in the biographical section, it says, "In 1976 Bob and Viola [his late wife] were involved in a church in which the youth were involved in immorality, drugs, and alcohol. The Lord told Bob to warn the youth leaders concerning God's judgment over these issues, which he did, but they wouldn't listen to him. 'You'd think that would've scared them, but it didn't,' Bob said. *Seven* young people under age 30 died in a six-week period in a variety of ways, including motorcycle accidents and drownings. The church leadership thought Bob was somehow responsible for the young people's deaths, and they put him out of the church" (italics mine).

¹⁹ Ken Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse: How to Break Free from Bad Church Experiences* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 82-114.

²⁰ Although, unlike in the Old Testament where only certain people were anointed (priests, prophets, kings), in the New Testament every Christian is anointed by God's Holy Spirit (see 1 John 2:27).

Why would someone put something so tragic on his own Website? When was the last time that you had seven “immoral” people die around you. Does that sound like God to you? (Consider that Jesus pursued and spent time with the “immoral” people and had problems with leaders.) No, of course not. *The reason he includes these things is because it’s a trophy for him. It “proves” he’s a prophet to himself and, he hopes, to those who read his bio. Never mind that seven people died; he was shown to be right. What else does putting this message there show? He is saying, “You had better listen to me. If you don’t, you may die, too.”*

So what really happened? The same thing that happens whenever false prophets speak: Darkness floods in and often the spirit of death.

There are further marks of false prophets:

- Divination, as described at the beginning of this article, is practiced in public meetings.
- Focus is put on nonessentials and especially on experience--there is high drama, and it is advertised. For example, another Website claimed that when this “prophet” ministers, those who attend experience supernatural lights and sounds. What does this have to do with the gospel though? Nothing. It’s not about glory for Jesus; it’s about the person’s own exaltation. (As one friend said, this describes a disco rather than a church service.) Supernatural signs and wonders are bragged about to betoken the false prophet’s special status as God’s anointed (although, of course, he will always state that it is for God’s glory).

As Ken Blue notes, people who don’t feel special, who perhaps feel inferior because unaffirmed, are inclined to be drawn under such self-appointed “prophets” so that they can be associated with the “elite,” thereby catching some of their reflected glory.²¹

In reality, such ministries are abusive. They fail to help believers into an adult position, a position of listening to God in community with other Christians. Rather, these ministries prey on people stuck in a childish posture, who need someone to tell them how to act, think, and believe.

The pseudo-prophet stands in a false masculine posture, pursuing glory, acclaim, and power, thus consigning those willing to follow to a passive false feminine posture. The “prophets” have the special knowledge; so those who watch their performances are to feel admiration and awe.

Interestingly, these prophets are aware that many in their ranks have sexual falls (this is one primary reason why Mike Bickle was happy to welcome Desert Stream to his ministry, International House of Prayer, in Kansas City, Missouri). *But why, if these pseudo-prophets are so close to God, do so many sexual falls occur?*

Falls occur because people come under the false prophet’s authoritarian leadership (his or her false masculine position), gladly taking a false feminine posture where they abdicate their rationality, judgment, and discernment. They

²¹ Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, pp. 114-14.

follow a narcissistic leader who is building an empire and who puts himself in the place of God. (Contrast this with Moses' aforementioned instruction in Deut. 18:15: Another Prophet will come, namely Jesus, to whom all must listen.) But, taking God's place, while abusing language via clever talk about servanthood, they domineer and lord power over their followers.

People who come under these pseudo-prophets self-deceive--they deny their own abdication of authority. They are unable to see their failure to take on an adult faith position with God. Although they may well have been gender-imbalanced before (often they will have come to the pseudo-prophet to receive the affirmation from an authority figure that they may not have received as children), this scenario involves a move into further gender-imbalance. By choosing to live from a false-feminine passivity under the pseudo-prophet's false masculine, they are abdicating a listening posture before God--even though they may be praying forty-plus hours per week. This gender-imbalance only heightens inner conflicts.

Particularly noteworthy here are those for whom their gender-imbalance involves inferiority, envy toward others (such as in the homosexual neurosis), and a need for affirmation. Entering an environment where the common currency is a lust for power and experience, as well as envy of the pseudo-prophet's so-called gifts, such people sink more deeply into their neurotic selves. This environment forces a person who chooses to remain in it to live from the neurotic self and thus at the mercy of infantile or childish neediness.

Having abdicated personal power to the pseudo-prophet, such persons' wills atrophy; they are therefore more inclined to fall into sin. Add to this the demonic oppression and other problems, sometimes including death, related to divination, and you have a tragedy in the making.

False prophets attract people uncomfortable with their own adulthood, power, and responsibility. Such persons regard personal responsibility as something frightening and are happy to abandon it to the pseudo-prophet--and pseudo-prophets are happy to capitalize on this situation. (This is what is happening when a person goes to a false prophet to receive a revelation about his or her destiny--(s)he is abdicating rationality, adulthood, and personal discernment to the pseudo-prophet. It is, as alluded to earlier, no different from going to a palm reader.)

Characteristics of True Prophets

In his book *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, Ken Blue describes various marks of good leadership. In the New Testament, leaders are supposed to be *servants*. Truth outranks position in church--hence Paul's rebuke of Peter in Galatians. A servant mentality displaces the need to look good, to show-off power, to have honorific titles and special privileges. An egalitarian church structure encourages each believer to speak the truth in love, rather than abdicating personal authority so as to be obsequiously postured under a leader. In the end, the church is supposed to equip all the saints for their own ministries, and this can only happen as leaders serve other believers on a level playing

field, helping them to grow as they engage with God personally. The good leader teaches everyone to listen and walk with God. Furthermore, healthy leadership is flexible. The good leader is strong when strength is needed, but he or she flexibly responds to people in such a way as to encourage their growth, sometimes by responding nondirectively and sometimes responding with great authority, depending on what is called for in a given situation. As Blue writes, the healthy leader's consistency is not in being authoritative but in being and doing what's needed for the person or situation at hand.²²

So it's critical for Christians to be able to discern what kind of Christian leaders they are following. Are the leaders in your church or at the conferences you attend more like servants and God's authentic prophets (humbly speaking truth in love), or do they resemble the false prophets who love honor and glory, who make grandiose claims for themselves, whose ministries encourage a childish posture of subservience in followers? Do the leaders base their ministries on God's Word, the scriptural revelation given to all Christians, or on special, secret knowledge to which they alone are privy? And how do the leaders to whom you are listening and from whom you are learning affect you? Do they encourage you to walk humbly with your God in listening obedience, or do they encourage you to grandiosity, in their own image, and to a lust for spiritual experiences?

False prophets are not only unhelpful, but extremely dangerous. They are dangerous because of their own narcissistic qualities (whereby they cleverly use the sheep for their own glory, all while making it look like they are serving the sheep) and because of the supernatural darkness they bring. For your sake, for the sake of those dear to you, and for the sake of the body of Christ itself, it is critically imperative that you discern what is going on in your churches and in the ministries whose conferences you attend.

In Conclusion

Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet. (Isa. 58:1 NKJV)
We have been given an unshakeable kingdom. (Heb. 2:28 JB)

The book I am currently writing (an autobiography and historical account of this ministry) is one in fullest celebration of the way Christ, by the power of His Spirit, came down, found and healed me, graciously and so unexpectedly and remarkably set into me the charisms of Pentecost, and then sent me forth to proclaim this *incarnational reality*, the way we are delivered from sin and empowered by the Spirit to pass on the saving, healing Word to others.

²² Ibid., pp. 140-50.

I write, therefore, from the standpoint of one who would not only warn others of the perversions and outright imitations of the Spirit's gifts and power, but teach them of the *true*. Over the past four decades of doing so, we've never failed to see profound reformation in the souls of men and women as God touches and heals them. Revival and reformation are a constant when God's presence and power are celebrated and acknowledged. I would also cry out to a church that has long neglected, failed to understand, or even denied the Spirit's charisms and, to their peril, I think, the person of the Holy Spirit as well. As a cult can only be replaced by the church, so too the syncretistic and false supernatural can only be replaced by the true and unadulterated operation of the Spirit's gifts.

In the late 1960s I was taking classes with earnest and gifted young evangelical students in which we studied the thought of Rudolph Bultmann and others who formulated and taught the methods involved in *historical-critical theology*. In alarm I saw the students beginning to question their faith because Bultmann's removal of the supernatural from the Scriptures had too many affinities with their own experience and training, which at that time was rigidly anti-charismatic. This failure to understand the charismatic (including the sacramental) as being part of the Christian supernatural left them vulnerable as well to the matching reductionistic ideologies that govern the social sciences.

In consternation and in every way possible, I cried out to them, "If you do not begin to live and move and have your being in Christ and in the knowledge and power of the Spirit He has sent upon the church, you will capitulate to the scientisms (materialism) of the day; you will be the liberals of the future." To eschew the true is eventually, even within the church, to be given over to the false. It is to see what we are seeing today, even travesties such as "prophets" being invited into evangelical churches and, while there, charging fees (Simon Magus-like) for their prognostications.

The vacuum created by the absence of the true has left in its wake the heresies we see today. As has been said, "Cults and sects are the unpaid bills of the church."²³ To pray for and see the full reformation of the church in the Western world is to see the power of the Holy Spirit fully at work, replacing that which has substituted for it, restoring to us once again the knowledge of the transcendent and the holy.

We fervently pray that God will use this newsletter to begin the healing of those adversely affected by the false prophetic and that the many precious pastors who know and need to speak out on these matters will be freed to do so. We pray as well for the dear and earnest souls who, desiring to serve the Lord, have gotten mixed up in false and syncretistic practices simply through

²³ Donald G. Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 176.

lack of knowledge and discernment. Know that it is gloriously possible to clean up one's life and ministry. It can amount to quite an exciting journey indeed.

We thank you for your faithful prayers and gifts to this ministry, and we are exceedingly blessed by the love many of you express so lavishly in your cards and letters. We look forward to seeing you in the upcoming schools.

Under the mercy,

Leanne Payne