How to Test False Prophets

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We are living in strange times where many are calling themselves apostles and prophets of God. The big challenge for the church is to properly discern who is genuine and who is false. The Bible warns us of a significant increase in deception, specifically mentioning a great increase in false prophets within the church (see 1 John 4:1-6, Matthew 7:15, 2 Peter 2:1, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).Jesus teaches us that "*false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect*" (Matthew 24:24). Today, all over the world, we are seeing people rising up and calling themselves prophets of God, so it is vital that we properly weed out the false from the true.

Signs & Accuracy Aren't Always Proof

Many modern prophets claim that their supernatural powers are proof that they are indeed the real thing. Yet miraculous powers are no measure to use in the light of Scriptural warnings. 'Prophets' make people eat snakes or will pour boiling water over congregants, which 'miraculously' does not burn them. I even saw one so-called prophet drive a car over his followers and somehow it did them no harm. Many of these 'prophets' will only minister or perform signs if they are guaranteed prescribed amounts of money from those who want to receive their blessing.

False Prophets in Sheep's Clothing

The Bible teaches us that they will come claiming to represent Christ (Matthew 24:5, Luke 21:8). Just because they call themselves Christians or claim that Jesus is their Lord is not evidence that they are the real thing. These false prophets will "*come to you in sheep's clothing*" (Matthew 7:15), which means they will seem like true Christians in their language and actions. They will say "*hallelujah*" and "*Jesus is Lord!*" and outwardly worship God and do other Christian things.

Accurate Prophecy by Divination

It must also be made clear that miracles and detailed, accurate prophecies are no proof that they are representing the Lord either. In Acts 16:16-17, we see a woman accurately prophesying that Paul and Barnabas were servants of God, that the Christian God is "*the Most High God*", and even that their message accurately proclaimed "*the way of salvation.*" Acts explains that she had a

"*spirit of divination*" and did not prophesy by the Holy Spirit. What should be concerning is that everything she said was right, yet Paul wisely recognised she was a false prophet.

Discerning False Prophets

We should learn from this and ensure that the prophets among us are authentic. The Bible teaches that we will know the true from the false by their fruit (Matthew 7:15). We are able to test through the discerning of spirits (one of the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12) and through perceiving their inner motives.

Inwardly Ravenous Wolves

We need to be able to recognise those who are false by discerning the "*inwardly are ravenous wolves*" (Matthew 7:15). If we look carefully, we will see that their gift is being used to serve their own hunger or need ("*ravenous wolves*"). Their own need for recognition, honour and praise will be their motivation. They will not come primarily to freely serve but will want seats of honour and power. They will lord it over people and love the fame that their gift provides, rather than being willing to serve without praise or recognition. They may, like the woman in Acts 16:15, prophesy for money. Instead of prophesying to serve the church freely (as Christ gave freely), they will demand a charge and so 'serve' for financial gain. Whether the church decides to bless them financially or not will make no difference to the authentic prophet. It will be their absolute joy to freely serve God's people with their gift.

Look At Me

Another giveaway was that this woman was continually "shouting" (Acts 16:16-17 NIV). Shouting itself was not the problem; it was rather the continual drawing of attention to herself. False prophets have a root of flesh, which Satan uses for his own purposes – to keep the focus on man. When we become solely aware of the person and their gift, then we are watching a prophet drawing attention to themselves rather than pointing in awe and wonder to the Lord. Of course, true prophets can also have areas of immaturity and insecurity, but they will always point people to Christ.

Receiving Authentic Prophets

The Bible warns that many false prophets will emerge before Christ's return. Therefore, we should not simply accept every prophet because they are accurate. We must look deeper to see fruit and heart attitude. We must also not go to the other extreme and reject every prophet or deny the real gift, simply because some have perverted it.

My prayer is that our churches will rightly receive every genuine prophet whom the Lord sends, while rejecting those they find to be false. In this way, we can rightly build upon the authentic prophetic office and ensure our churches' foundations remain properly built upon the cornerstone of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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