

Prophetic Protocol

A protocol may be defined as a set of rules, procedures or behaviours that govern how a particular meeting, relationship or proceedings may be organised and take place - an accepted way of doing things, such as how a Sunday service is structured and run.

Prophecy is all about hearing from God *what* to say; while 'prophetic protocol' is all about the *if* and the *when* and the *how* to communicate it - the *if* and the *when* and the *how* we say things can be as important as the *what*.

The Bible is a book full of prophecies, and in the Old Testament we read the following, which still applies today: Amos 3:7 *Indeed, the Sovereign Lord never does anything until he reveals his plans to his servants the prophets.*

Prophecy should form part of our services and meetings – the Lord is always wanting to speak to us and to give us direction and encouragement. 1 Corinthians 14:26 *Well, my brothers and sisters, let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given (a prophecy), one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.*

Jesus, as head of the Church (Colossians 1:18) has given the church (all of us) five different types of leadership gifts, all of which are to be used 'to equip God's people to do His work': Ephesians 4:11-12 NLT *Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.*

This article is not about the *relevance* of the prophetic, which I believe we all accept, but about the *presentation* of prophecy – the guidelines that apply to as far as possible ensure that prophetic words are both Holy Spirit inspired and delivered in a way that always both honours the Father and benefits the recipients.

1 Corinthians 14:39-40 *So, my dear brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and don't forbid speaking in tongues. But be sure that everything is done properly and in order.*

THE IF

The big question is often whether to say anything at all, especially in a church or other public meeting ! The first step is to listen and to hear what the Spirit is saying, and the next to decide if it is meant to be communicated to the person or group, at that time, or even at all.

My feeling is that when in doubt, don't say anything – or at least wait for God to confirm it.

Sometimes we have to wait (and pray) for clarification before delivering the message.

Far better to be a bit late by waiting for confirmation, both on IF to say anything, and WHAT to say.

Rather miss out on delivering a word - let God use someone else if you are not sure. An incorrect or untimely word can cause a lot of harm, or undo a whole lot of good done before.

Motive

What is our motive when we prophesy? Is it to glorify God, or for our own pride and reputation?

And if we are invited to speak anywhere, what is the motive of those inviting us?

In this regard we should, when an opportunity arises or on receiving an invitation to minister anywhere in the prophetic, first consider the following factors:

- Whose kingdom would we be coming to build - our own 'kingdom' (personal reputation – check our own motives first), the 'kingdom' of the leader or the person who invited us, or anyone else's kingdom? – or only Jesus' kingdom.
- How does the leadership of the host church or organisation expect us to address them in public, and how will they introduce and address us? In each case it should not be by any title, such as prophet, pastor, teacher, 'man of God' etc. (No one in the New Testament ever used a title; only a mention of their function at the most.)

- How would they expect us to dress? No-one should ever dress up to try and look smarter, and hence superior to anyone else attending, and
- Wherever practically possible, we should not be standing on a platform or stage and speaking down (physically or metaphorically) to anyone else.

What For?

The 5-fold ministry in Ephesians 4:11-12 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) was given to the church as 5 special functions for the joint purpose to '*equip God's people to do His work and build up the church*', or to '*equip his people for works of service*'. All 5 gifts are for the purpose of serving the body, not ourselves, and we are all supposed to contribute and to work in unity to fulfil the great commission (Matthew 28:19-20) to make mature and fully equipped disciples, each functioning in their calling - not just to attract and to gain church 'members'. (How many in your church would you say are dedicated, trained and equipped disciples, and how many are just members?)

There is typically a tendency in each of us to focus on the importance of our own ministry, and to relegate the other functions to 'optional extras', so those in the prophetic ministry have to be particularly sensitive and understanding in their relationship with pastors – the prophetic ministry can be intimidating, and especially to a pastor who may not be gifted in and may not understand the prophetic and, as per his function, focuses on the protection of his flock, perhaps to the detriment of inspiring, teaching and releasing each person in his congregation into each of *their* personal ministries.

A pastor typically encourages through comforting and reassuring sermons; a prophet encourages through revelation to fulfil a calling. Pastors need to appreciate that their churches will never achieve their ordained potential unless founded on and guided by apostolic and prophetic input (Ephesians 2:20). (Os Hillman had a word that '220' volts are twice as powerful as 110 volts – hence Ephesians '2.20' – a church accepting apostolic and prophetic input will be twice as strong).

WHEN

Prophecy should be for whenever believers meet together – formally or informally, including in Sunday services. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14:26 *...when you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given (prophecy), one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.* Note that this does *not* mean that only 'one' person can sing or teach etc. 1 Corinthians 14:29 *Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said.* ('Evaluate' - KJV says 'judge', but the meaning is more to discern, digest, interpret etc.) To similarly limit prophetic words to say that only 2 or maximum 3 people may prophesy is incorrect – this is not prescriptive, just to practically give time to evaluate the words brought before they are forgotten.

The trouble is often that prophecy is just not that welcome in many churches, and particularly not in their typical Sunday services. Some pastors etc will just reject the prophetic ministry as having ceased in the 1st Century AD (Cessationists), others will look for an excuse to exclude it. Some will say that prophecy can only be given by someone who is a member of their denomination and known to and trusted by their leadership. Others will say that since false prophets may be identified by their fruit, if anyone is not 'perfect' (in their opinion) then he/she cannot be a prophet, or at least cannot be accepted and allowed to prophesy until their character can be proven. 'The passage *... know them by their fruit*' in Mathew 7:15-20 is typically quoted in support, but of course this is only one of the tests of a prophet, and the Lord can use some strange people! (Just look around today!). Other excuses will be 'let me see if there is time to fit in your prophesy', and 'I will see if your word fits in with the word preached.' But to these arguments one must ask 'does it really have to?' This may well be an example of an historical, and probably denominational, concept, i.e. an accepted protocol of how their meetings were to be run, holding that any interruptions or change cannot be tolerated! This illustrated the importance of us *all* being led by the Holy Spirit, and not to allow restrictive protocols to limit a prophetic word or even a move of the Holy Spirit – just look at what occurred with the Azusa Street Revival, the Jesus movement, the

charismatic renewal - each of these broke existing protocols as did each move of the Spirit that followed, right up until this present moment.

Prophets should always do their best not to offend. Paul said that ‘.. *Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some*’ (1 Corinthians 9:22). We need to make ourselves and our presentation as acceptable as possible. We do not need to copy John the Baptist - can you imagine anyone looking like him being welcome in a modern church! *John’s clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey* (Matthew 3:4). So try not to even risk offending anyone in the way by the way you dress or look, or by acting outrageously – or you, and your word, might just be rejected, and everyone will then lose out.

Market Place Prophecy

There have been many great testimonies on prophetic words having been given to people in businesses and shops etc. – this is exciting, and inspiring. A prophetic word to one person can change that person’s life, and maybe their family, maybe their workplace, or even a whole town! Jesus was great at market-place prophecy. Just look at what happened when he spoke to a woman at a well in Samaria in John 4. He gave her a prophetic word of knowledge, and she called Him a prophet and ran back to the village to tell everyone, and they all came streaming from the village to see Jesus.

THE HOW

As God speaks

1 Peter 4:11 *Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you . . .*

Simply

1 Corinthians 14:9 *It’s the same for you. If you speak to people in words they don’t understand, how will they know what you are saying? You might as well be talking into empty space.*

Explain pictures & imagery

Don’t expect the average person to understand pictures, images and metaphors etc. Take the time to ask God first, if necessary, before speaking and presenting a complex message.

Don’t elaborate

Sometimes we are just like the postman, and not expected to understand. Don’t guess at the meaning. Also don’t try and counsel, as a rule, if your focus is on prophesy. Leave that to another occasion, and even another person.

Keep it short

Don’t wate everyone’s’ time, especially in a meeting, by standing up and then saying nothing. Rather wait until you get the full message or to get clarity on it, before you start speaking.

Public or private

Some words are meant to be delivered in private – in this case ensure that there is no-one else who will be able to hear what you are saying. It also helps tremendously if the volume of the music is turned right down while people are prophesying, so that the prophets and the recipients can hear each other – NB pastors and anyone who controls a music desk.

Permission

In church prophets are under the authority of its leadership, and can only prophecy with the consent of its leadership.

Children

First ask their parents’ consent, and have them present, or write down the message for the parents to read and to handle as they see fit.

Gender

For married couples it is always preferable to have them both present. If prophesying to a person of the opposite gender, rather have a person with you, such as an elder, or a person of their gender, such as a fellow prophet, as a witness.

Caution

Be very careful about prophesying dates, marriage, gender of children etc.

Prophecies for a church and/or its leaders

It is always advisable to provide the leaders with an outline of what you feel led to say before speaking the word out publicly at a service or meeting. If permission is refused, it will be their responsibility. NB prophecies for a church are for the *whole* church, not just the leaders, and the leadership should wherever possible record, transcribe and have these prophetic words on record for all members to read, be encouraged by, and to pray into, at any time in the future.

Apologise

If the person disagrees with or rejects what you have prophesied, even if you are sure that you heard correctly, rather apologise and leave it at that. Acceptance or rejection of a prophetic word is always the responsibility of the recipient.

Humility

Firstly we need to remember that the Prophetic ministry, as part of the 5-fold gifts of Ephesians 4:11-12, is a gift by God *to* the body. The body, i.e. the rest of the church, is *not* a gift to the 5 ministries, for them to use and abuse as they like! The prophetic ministry is a service – part of the Great Commission of equipping God's people to become disciples, who are trained and equipped to do His work. The function of the 5-fold is to: ... *equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.* (Eph 4:12).

Secondly, the last and possibly greatest lesson that Jesus taught his disciples was humility - to serve each other, by taking on the lowest job of washing their feet (John 13). Jesus then told them very pointedly: v15: *I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.'*

Always function within your (current) limits: Romans 12:6 *In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you.* So what am I saying? There is no room for pride in the prophetic ministry - or in any other ministry.

Keep in mind that true prophets have historically faced rejection and even persecution. (See Matthew 5:12; 23:29-37). We need to guard against any appearance of being, or being associated with, false or even insincere prophets and prophetic movements. Beware of those who claim fancy titles and demand exorbitant fees, and even appearance fees. False prophets will arise; Matthew 4:11 *and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people,* But I am not even talking about them, but about prophets who have been misled and lost their first love, and with it their focus and direction.

I do not believe that we portray God's heart of love with an attitude of : 'well I am a prophet, that is just the way I am and the way I speak, and this is the way I act and I dress, so you just have to accept me as I am, and tough luck if you don't! Remember that Jesus became a man for us - that was quite a step down from heaven.

The apostles demonstrated how seriously they took this. In Acts 16 Paul wanted to take Timothy with on a mission trip, but because Timothy's father was Greek and the Jews in the area might not accept him, he first arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left. How much are we willing to sacrifice to be a true prophet of God?

THE WHAT

Fortunately New Testament prophets are not subject to the same test as the Old Testament prophets: The test of a false prophet in the Old Testament was whether they foretold the future

correctly, and the penalty for failure was death (Deuteronomy 18:20-22.) False prophets will arise: Matthew 24:11 *And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people.* Though we are no longer under threat of a death penalty, as true prophets of God we all have a responsibility to speak as accurately and as clearly as we can.

Our primary responsibility as prophets is to:

Strengthen and encourage

1 Corinthians 14:3 *But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them.* 1 Corinthians 14:31 *so that everyone will learn and be encouraged.*

But prophets also:

Set the foundations of each church in place:

Ephesians 2:20 *Together, we are His house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.*

Relay God's instructions:

Acts 13:2 *... Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them."*

Foretell future events:

Acts 11:28 *... Agabus stood up and through the Spirit predicted (prophesied) that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world.*

Acts 21:11 (Agabus) *Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"*

Expand

'Each ministry gift should multiply after its kind. It's a spiritual law and our mandate. Be fruitful and multiply!' (Bert Farias)

2 Timothy 2:2 *You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.*

Note that in Acts 13:1 we are told that in the church of Antioch there were 'prophets and teachers' – note the plural of each – and it then goes on to name them. Can your church name its prophets and teachers? And are they functioning in their giftings? Are you raising up 'Timothies' or better yet teams of prophets and of teachers to help minister to all, and to make disciples and to grow the church?

CONCLUSION

We will all be misunderstood, rejected, and make mistakes at some time; we have to get up, to get over it, and to get on with it. No one is perfect - God knows, and always forgives us!

Even Paul said: Philippians 3:12-13 *I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ...*

Can you forgive yourself for missing it on occasion? Can you forgive and forget your own mistakes, and get on with it? Jesus forgives instantly when we pray to Him and repent – how long does it take us to forgive ourselves? Do not allow discouragement to hold you back, and one day there will be many people waiting to thank you for encouraging them and helping them on their way to fulfil their callings and destinies and to receive their rewards, as you too will receive yours.

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